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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
WRITINGS AND GENIUS
OF
SHAKESPEAR,
COMPARED WITH THE
GREEK AND FRENCH DRAMATIC POETS.
WITH
SOME REMARKS
Upon the MISREPRESENTATIONS of
Mons. de VOLTAIRE.

L O N D O N :

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M.DCC.LXIX.

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NOTES

1. The first part of the notes is devoted to a general
 2. description of the subject matter.
 3. The second part is devoted to a detailed description of the
 4. various methods used in the investigation.
 5. The third part is devoted to a description of the results
 6. obtained from the various experiments.
 7. The fourth part is devoted to a description of the conclusions
 8. drawn from the results.
 9. The fifth part is devoted to a description of the
 10. various methods used in the investigation.

REFERENCES

1. The first reference is to the work of Smith and Jones
 2. on the subject of the effect of temperature on the rate of
 3. reaction. The second reference is to the work of Brown
 4. and Green on the subject of the effect of pressure on the
 5. rate of reaction. The third reference is to the work of
 6. White and Black on the subject of the effect of concentration
 7. on the rate of reaction. The fourth reference is to the work
 8. of Gray and Blue on the subject of the effect of catalysts
 9. on the rate of reaction. The fifth reference is to the work
 10. of Red and Purple on the subject of the effect of solvents
 11. on the rate of reaction.

[I]

A

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his fame. He is now in danger of incurring the fate of the heroes of the fabulous ages, on whom the vanity of their country, and the superstition of the times, bestowed an apotheosis founded on pretensions to achievements beyond human capacity, by which they lost in a more sceptical and critical age, the glory that was due to them for what they had really done; and all the veneration they had obtained, was ascribed to ignorant credulity, and national prepossession.—Our Shakespear, whose very faults pass here unquestioned, or are perhaps consecrated through the enthusiasm of his admirers, and the veneration paid to long-established fame, is by a great wit, a great critic, and a great poet of a neighbouring nation, treated as the writer of monstrous farces, called by him tragedies; and barbarism and ignorance are attributed to the nation by which he is admired. Yet if wits, poets, critics, could ever be charged with presumption, one might say there was some degree of it in pronouncing, that, in a country where Sophocles and Euripides are as well understood as in any

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in Europe, the perfections of dramatic poetry should be as little comprehended as among the Chinese.

Learning here is not confined to ecclesiastics, or a few lettered sages and academics; every English gentleman has an education, which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients. His knowledge of polite literature does not begin with that period which Mr. de Voltaire calls *Le Siècle de Louis quatorze*. Before he is admitted as a spectator at the theatre at London, it is probable he has heard the tragic muse as she spoke at Athens, and as she now speaks at Paris, or in Italy; and he can discern between the natural language in which she addressed the human heart, and the artificial dialect which she has acquired from the prejudices of a particular nation, or the jargon caught from the tone of a court. To please upon the French stage, every person of every age and nation was made to adopt their manners.

A 2

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The heroes of antiquity were not more disguised in the romances of Calprenede and Scuderi than in the tragedies of Corneille. In spite of the admonition given by that admirable critic Boileau to their dramatic writers in the following lines :

Gardez donc de donner, ainsi que dans Clélie,
L'air ni l'esprit François à l'antique Italie;
Et sous des noms Romains faissant notre portrait,
Peindre Caton galant, & Brutus damoret.

The Horatii are represented no less obsequious in their address to their king than the courtiers of the grand monarch. Theseus is made a mere fighting swain. Many of the greatest men of antiquity, and even the roughest heroes among the Goths and Vandals, were exhibited in this effeminate form. The poet dignified the piece, perhaps with the name of an Hercules, but, alas! it was always Hercules spinning that was shewn to the spectator. The editor of Corneille's works, in terms so gross as are hardly pardonable

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donable in such a master of fine raillery, frequently attacks our Shakespear for the want of delicacy and politeness in his pieces: it must be owned, that in some places they bear the marks of the unpolished times in which he wrote, but one cannot forbear smiling to hear a critic, who professes himself an admirer of the tragedies of Corneille, object to the barbarism of Shakespear's. There never was a more barbarous mode of writing than that of the French romances in the last age, nor which from its tediousness, languor, and want of truth of character is less fit to be copied on the stage: and what are most the parts of Corneille's boasted tragedies, but the romantic dialogue, its tedious soliloquy, and its extravagant sentiments in the true Gothic livery of rhyme?

The French poets assume a superiority over Shakespear, on account of their more constant adherence to Aristotle's unities of time and place.

The pedant who bought at a great price

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the

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lamp of a famous philosopher, expecting that by its assistance his lucubrations would become equally celebrated, was little more absurd than those poets who suppose their dramas will be excellent if they are regulated by Aristotle's clock. To bring within a limited time and an assigned space certain series of conversations (and French plays are little more) is no difficult matter; for that is the easiest part of every art perhaps, but in poetry without dispute, in which the connoisseur can direct the artist.

I do not believe the critic imagined that a more obedience to his laws of drama would make a good tragedy, tho' it might prevent a poet more bold than judicious, from writing a very absurd one. A painter can define the just proportion of the human body, and the anatomist knows what muscles constitute the strength of the limbs; but grace of motion, and exertion of strength, depend on the mind, which animates the form. The critic but fashions the body of a work; the poet must add the soul, which gives force

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force and direction to its actions and gestures : when one of these critics has attempted to finish a work by his own rules, he has rarely been able to convey into it one spark of divine fire ; and the hero of his piece, whom he designed for a man, remains a cold inanimate statue ; which, moving on the wood and wire of the great masters in the mechanical part of the drama, presents to the spectators a kind of heroic puppet-show. As these pieces take their rise in the school of criticism, they return thither again, and are as good subjects for the students in that art, as a dead body to the professors in physic. Most minutely too have they been anatomised in learned academies : but works animated by genius will not abide this kind of dissection.

Mr. Pope says, that, to form a judgment of Shakespear's works, we are not to apply to the rules of Aristotle, which would be like trying a man by the laws of one country, who lived under those of another.—

Heaven-born genius acts from something

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superior to rules, and antecedent to rules ;
and has a right of appeal to nature herself.

Great indulgence is due to the errors of original writers, who, quitting the beaten track which others have travelled, make daring incursions into unexplored regions of invention, and boldly strike into the pathless sublime : it is no wonder if they are often bewildered, sometimes benighted ; yet surely it is more eligible to partake the pleasure and the toil of their adventures, than still to follow the cautious steps of timid imitators through trite and common roads. Genius is of a bold enterprizing nature, ill adapted to the formal restraints of critic institutions, or indeed to lay down to itself rules of nice discretion. If perfect and faultless composition is ever to be expected from human faculties, it must be at some happy period when a noble and graceful simplicity, the result of well regulated and sober magnanimity, reigns through the general manners. Then the muses and the arts, neither effeminately delicate nor audaciously
bold,

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bold, assume their highest character, and in all their compositions seem to respect the chastity of the public taste, which would equally disdain quaintness of ornament, or the rude neglect of elegance and decorum. Such periods had Greece, had Rome ! Then were produced immortal works of every kind ! But, when the living manners degenerated, in vain did an Aristotle and a Quintilian endeavour to restore by doctrine what had been inspired by sentiments, and fashioned by manners.

If the severer muses, whose sphere is the library and the senate, are obliged in complaisance to this degeneracy, to trick themselves out with meretricious and frivolous ornaments, as is too apparent from the compositions of the historians and orators in declining empires, can we wonder that a dramatic poet, whose chief interest it is to please the people, should, more than any other writer, conform himself to their humour ; and appear most strongly infected with the faults of the times, whether they
be

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be such as belong to unpolished, or corrupted taste.

Shakespear wrote at a time when learning was interlarded with pedantry; wit was unpolished, and mirth ill-bred. The court of Elizabeth spoke a scientific jargon, and a certain obscurity of style was universally affected. James brought an addition of pedantry, accompanied by indecent and indelicate manners and language. By contagion, or from complaisance to the taste of the public, Shakespear falls sometimes into the fashionable mode of writing: but this is only by fits; for many parts of all his plays are written with the most noble, elegant, and uncorrupted simplicity. Such is his merit, that the more just and refined the taste of the nation has become, the more he has increased in reputation. He was approved by his own age, admired by the next, and is revered, and almost adored by the present. His merit is disputed by little wits, and his errors are the jests of little critics; but there has not been a great poet,

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poet, or great critic, since his time, who has not spoken of him with the highest veneration, Mr. Voltaire excepted. His translations often, his criticisms still oftener, prove he did not perfectly understand the words of the author; and therefore it is certain he could not enter into his meaning. He comprehended enough to perceive he was unobservant of some established rules of composition; the felicity with which he performs what no rules can teach escapes him. Will not an intelligent spectator admire the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge, because he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raised? Like them, our author's works will remain for ever the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatness.

It has been already declared that Shakespear is not to be tried by any code of critic laws;

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laws ; nor is it more equitable to judge him entirely by the practice of any particular theatre.. Yet some criterion must be established by which we may determine his merits. First; we must take into consideration what is proposed to be done by the means of dramatic imitation. Every species of poetry has its distinct offices. The effecting certain moral purposes, by the representation of a fable, seems to have been the universal intention, from the first institution of the drama to this time ; and to have prevailed, not only in Europe, but in all countries where the dramatic art has been attempted. It has indeed been the common aim of all poetry to please and instruct ; but by means as various as the kinds of composition. We are pleased with the ode, the elegy, the eclogue ; not only for having invention, spirit, elegance, and such perfections as are necessary to recommend any sort of poetry, but we also require that each should have its specific merit ; the ode, that which constitutes the perfection of an ode,

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ode, &c. In these views, then, our author is to be examined. First, if his fables answer the noblest end of fable, moral instruction; next, whether his dramatic imitation has its proper dramatic excellence. In the latter of these articles, perhaps, there is not any thing will more assist our judgment than a candid comparison (where the nature of the subjects well bear it) between his and some other celebrated dramatic compositions. It is idle to refer to a vague, unrealized idea of perfection: we may safely pronounce that to be well executed, in any art, which after the repeated efforts of great geniuses is equal to any thing that has been produced. We may securely applaud what the ancients have crowned; therefore should not withhold our approbation wherever we find our countryman has equalled the most admired passages in the Greek tragedians: but we shall not do justice to his native talents, when they are the object of consideration, if we do not remember the different circumstances under which

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which these writers were composed. Shakspeare's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity : the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auspices of the magistrates at Athens; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoisseurs in public spectacles. The period when Sophocles and Euripides wrote, was that in which the fine arts, and polite literature, were in a degree of perfection which succeeding ages have emulated in vain.

It happened in the literary as in the moral world; a few sages, from the veneration which they had obtained by extraordinary wisdom and a faultless conduct, rose to the authority of legislators. The practice and manner of the three celebrated Greek tragedians were by succeeding critics established as dramatic laws : happily for Shakspeare, Mr. Johnson, whose genius and learning render

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render him superior to a servile awe of pedantic institutions, in his ingenious preface to his edition of Shakespear has greatly obviated all that can be objected to our author's neglect of the unities of time and place.

Shakespear's felicity has been rendered compleat in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy : but some of the lighter characters were become illegible ; these have been restored by critics whose learning and penetration traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced, and the testimonies of these learned commentators to his merit, will guard our author's great monument of human wit from the presumptuous invasions of our rash critics, and the squibs of our wittlings ; so that the bays will flourish unwithered and inviolate round his tomb ; and his very spirit seems to come forth and to animate his characters, as often as Mr.

Garrick,

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Garrick, who acts with the same inspiration with which he wrote, assumes them on the stage.

After our poet had received such important services from the united efforts of talents and learning in his behalf, some apology seems necessary for this work. Let it be remembered that the most superb and lasting monument that ever was consecrated to beauty, was that to which every lover carried a tribute. I dare hope to do him honour only by augmenting the heap of volumes given by his admirers to his memory ; I will own I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he had received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our countryman in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every entire piece as a monstrous and ill-constructed farce.

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farce.—Ridiculously has our poet, and ridiculously has our taste been represented, by a writer of universal fame ; and through the medium of an almost universal language. Superficial criticisms hit the level of shallow minds, to whom a bon mot will ever appear reason, and an epigrammatic turn argument; so that many of our countrymen have hastily adopted this lively writer's opinion of the extravagance and total want of design in Shakespear's dramas. With the more learned, deep, and sober critics he lies under one considerable disadvantage. For copying nature as he found it in the busy walks of human life, he drew from an original, with which the literati are seldom well acquainted. They perceive his portraits are not of the Grecian or of the Roman school : after finding them unlike to the celebrated forms preserved in learned museums they do not deign to enquire whether they resemble the living persons they were intended to represent. Among these connoisseurs, whose acquaintance with the characters of men is

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formed in the library, not in the street, the camp, or village, whatever is unpolished and uncouth passes for fantastic and absurd, though, in fact, it is a faithful representation of a really existing character.

But it must be acknowledged, that, when this objection is obviated there will yet remain another cause of censure ; for though our author, from want of delicacy or from a desire to please the popular taste, thought he had done well when he faithfully copied nature, or represented customs, it will appear to politer times the error of an untutored mind ; which the example of judicious artists, and the admonitions of delicate connoisseurs had not taught, that only graceful nature and decent customs give proper subjects for imitation. It may be said in mitigation of his fault that the vulgar here had not, as at Athens, been used to behold,

Gorgeous

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Gorgeous tragedy

In scepter'd pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes or Palaps' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

Homer's works alone were sufficient to teach the Greek poets how to write, and their audience how to judge. The songs sung by our bards at feasts and merry-makings were of a very coarse kind : as the people were totally illiterate, and only the better sort could read even their mother tongue, their taste was formed on these compositions. As yet our stage had exhibited only those palpable allegories by which rude unlettered moralists instruct and please the gross and ignorant multitude. Nothing can more plainly evince the opinion the poets of those times had of the ignorance of the people, than the condescension shewn to it by the learned Earl of Dorset in his tragedy of *Gorboduc* ; in which the moral of each act is represented on the stage in dumb shew. It is strange that Mr. de Voltaire who affects

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an impartial and philosophic spirit, should not rather speak with admiration than contempt of an author, who by the force of genius rose so much above the age and circumstances in which he was born, and who, even when he deviates most from rules, *can rise to faults true critics dare not mend.* In delineating characters he must be allowed far to surpass all dramatic writers, and even Homer himself ; he gives an air of reality to every thing, and, in spite of many and great faults, effects, better than any one has done, the chief purposes of the theatrical representation. It avails little to prove that the means by which he effects them are not those prescribed in any art of poetry. While we feel the power and energy of his predominant genius, shall we not be apt to treat the cold formal precepts of the critic, with the same peevish contempt that the good lady in the Guardian, smarting in the anguish of a burn, does her son's pedantic intrusion of Mr. Lock's doctrine, to prove that there is no heat in fire. Nature and
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sentiment will pronounce our Shakespear a mighty genius; judgment and taste will confess that as a writer he is far from being faultless.

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ON

ON THE
D R A M A:
OR, ON
DRAMATIC POETRY.

B 4

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ON THE
D R A M A ;
OR, ON
DRAMATIC POETRY.

TO form a true judgment of the merit of any dramatic composition, we should first consider the offices and ends of the drama ; what are its pretensions, and for what purposes it assumes a manner so different from any other kind of poetical imitation. The epic poem and the tragedy, says Aristotle, are purely imitations* ; but the dramatic is an imitation of the actions of men, by the means of action itself. The epic is also an imitation of the actions of men, but it imitates by narration. The most perfect, and the best imitation, is certainly that which gives the most adequate,

* Arist. Poet. C. 1, Chap. 3.

lively,

lively, and faithful copy of the thing imitated. Homer was so sensible of the superior force and efficacy of the dramatic manner, that he often drops the narrative to assume it; and Aristotle says, that for having invented the dramatic imitation, and not only on account of his other excellencies, He alone deserves the name of poet*. It is apparent, therefore, how far this great critic prefers this, to every other species of imitation.

The general object of poetry, among the ancients, was the instruction of mankind, in religion, morals, philosophy, &c. To these great purposes were tuned the harps of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, Callimachus, &c. Nor in Greece alone was poetry the teacher, and the guardian of the sanctities of human society. † Our Northern bards assumed the same holy offices; the same sacred character. They directed the modes of divine worship: they taught the moral duties; inspired and celebrated heroic deeds; sung the praises of valour, and the charms of

* Chap. 4. † Histoire des Celtes, l. 2. c. 9.

liberty;

liberty ; and snatched from oblivion the bold achievements, and meritorious acts, of patriots, and of heroes. In the East, the poet veiled his inventions in mysterious allegories and divine mythology ; and rather endeavoured to raise the mind to heavenly contemplations, than to instruct it in human affairs.

In Greece, the general mother of arts, arose the mighty genius of Homer ; of whom it may be said, as it is of Socrates with relation to philosophy, that he brought poetry from heaven, to live in cities among men. The moral of the fable of the Iliad is adapted to the political state of Greece, whose various chiefs are thereby exhorted to unanimity ; the Odyssy, to the general condition of human nature ; but the episodical part of his works he has enriched with mythology, physical allegory, the fine arts, and whatever adorned the mind of man, or blest society ; even rules of domestic economy, social behaviour, and all the sweet civilities of life, are taught by this great master,

master, of what may be called, in the most enlarged sense, the humanities. Yet first in the rank of all the eminent perfections of this unequalled bard, is placed the invention of the dramatic imitation, by a critic, whose judgment was formed by philosophy, and a deep knowledge of human nature. He saw the powerful agency of living words, joined to moving things, when still narration yields the place to animated action.

It is as a moral philosopher, not as the mere connoisseur in a polite art, that Aristotle gives the preference, above all other modes of poetic imitation, to tragedy, as capable to purge the passions, by the means of pity and terror †. The object of the epic poem is to inspire magnanimity; to give good documents of life; to induce good habits §, and, as a wholesome regimen, to preserve the whole moral economy in a certain soundness and integrity. But it is not composed of ingredients of such efficacy as to subdue the violent distempers of the mind,

† Chap. 6. § Du Poëme Epique par Bossu, l. 2. c. 17.

nor can apply its art to the benefit of the ignorant vulgar, where those distempers are in their most exasperated state. An epic poem is too abstruse for the people; the moral is too much enveloped, the language too elevated for their apprehension; nor have they leisure, or application, to trace the consequences of ill governed passions, or erroneous principles, through the long series of a voluminous work. The drama is happily constituted for this purpose. Events are brought within the compass of a short period: precepts are delivered in the familiar way of discourse: the fiction is concealed, the allegory is realized: and representation and action take the place of cold unaffecting narration. A tragedy is a fable exhibited to the view, and rendered palpable to the senses; and every decoration of the stage is contrived to impose the delusion on the spectator, by conspiring with the imitation. It is addressed to the imagination, through which it opens to itself a communication to the heart, where it is to excite certain passions and affections: each character being
 perso-

personated, and each event exhibited, the attention of the audience is greatly captivated, and the imagination so far aids in the delusion, as to sympathize with the representation. To the muse of tragedy, therefore, Mr. Pope has assigned the noble task,

To wake the soul by tender-strokes of art,
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart.
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.

He ascribes such power to a well-wrought scene, as to ask,

When Cato groans who does not wish to bleed?

He would not have supposed the death of Hector, or Sarpedon, to have had an equal effect on any reader of the Iliad; such enthusiasm is to be caught only from the stage, and is the effect alone of strong-working sympathy, and passions agitated by the peculiar force and activity of the dramatic manner. Writers of feeble genius, in their compositions for the stage, frequently deviate into the narrative and descriptive style; a fault for which nothing can atone; for the drama is a species of

poetry, as distinct from the epic, as statuary from painting; and can no more receive that merit which specifically belongs to it, and constitutes its perfection, from fine versification, or any other poetical ornaments, than a statue can be rendered a fine specimen of sculpture, from being beautifully coloured, or highly polished. It is frivolous and idle, therefore, to insist on any little incidental and accessory beauties, where the main part, the very constitution of the thing, is defective. Yet on some trivial beauties do the French found all their pretensions to superiority and excellence in the drama.

According to Aristotle there can be no tragedy without action *. Mr. Voltaire confesses that some of the most admired tragedies, in France, are rather conversations, than representations of an action. It will hardly be allowed to those who fail in the most essential part of an art, to set up their performances as models. Can they

* Arist. chap. vi.

who

who have robbed the tragic muse of all her virtue, and divested her of whatsoever gave her a real interest in the human heart, require we should adore her for the glitter of a few false brilliants, or the nice arrangement of frippery ornaments? If she wears any thing of intrinsic value it has been borrowed from the ancients; but by these artists it is so fantastically fashioned to modern modes, as to lose all its original graces, and even that necessary qualification of all ornaments, fitness and propriety. A French tragedy is a tissue of declamations; and some laboured recitals of the catastrophe; by which the spirit of the drama is greatly weakened and enervated, and the theatrical piece is deprived of that peculiar influence over the mind, which it derives from the vivid force of representation.

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,

Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ

Ipse sibi tradit spectator.

The business of the drama is to excite
sym-

sympathy ; and its effect on the spectator depends on such a justness of imitation, as shall cause, to a certain degree, the same passions and affections, as if what was exhibited was real. We have observed narrative imitation to be too faint and feeble a means to excite passion : declamation, still worse, plays idly on the surface of the subject, and makes the poet, who should be concealed in the action, visible to the spectator. In many works of art, our pleasure arises from a reflection on the art itself ; and in a comparison, drawn by the mind, between the original and the copy before us. But here the art and the artist must not appear ; for, as often as we recur to the poet, so often our sympathy with the action on the stage is suspended. The pompous declamations of the French theatre are mere rhetorical flourishes, such as an uninterested person might make on the state of the persons in the drama. They assume the office of the spectator by expressing his feelings, instead of conveying to us the strong emotions and sensations of the persons

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under the pressure of distress. Experience informs us, that even the inarticulate groans, and involuntary convulsions, of a creature in agonies, affect us much more, than the most eloquent and elaborate description of its situation, delivered in the properest words, and most significant gestures. Our pity is attendant on the passion of the unhappy person, and on his own sense of his misfortunes. From description, from the report of a spectator, we may make some conjecture of his internal state of mind, and so far we shall be moved : but the direct and immediate way to the heart is by the sufferer's expression of his passion. As there may be some obscurity in what I have said on this subject, I will endeavour to illustrate the doctrine by examples.

Sophocles, in his admirable tragedy of *Œdipus Coloneus*, makes *Œdipus* expostulate with his undutiful son. The injured parent exposes the enormity of filial disobedience ; sets forth the duties of this relation in a very strong and lively manner ; but it is only by
the

the vehemence with which he speaks of them, and the imprecations he utters against the delinquent son, that we can guess at the violence of his emotions ; therefore he excites more indignation at the conduct of Polynices, than sympathy with his own sorrow ; of which we can judge only as spectators ; for he has explained to us merely the external duties and relations of parent and child. The pangs of paternal tenderness, thus wounded, is more pathetically expressed by King Lear, who leaves out whatever of this enormity is equally sensible to the spectator, and immediately exposes to us his own internal feelings, when, in the bitterness of his soul, cursing his daughter's offspring, he adds,

That she may feel,
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,
To have a thankless child.

By this we perceive how deeply paternal affection is wounded by filial ingratitude.

In the play of King John, the legate offers many arguments of consolation to Constance, on the loss of Arthur : they appear, to the spectator, reasonable, till she so strongly expresses the peculiar tenderness of maternal love, by answering,

He speaks to me that never had a son.

One might be made to conceive, in some degree, the horrors of a murderer, under whose knife the bleeding victim is expiring in agonies, by a description of the unhappy object ; but how fully, and how forcibly, is the consciousness of guilt expressed by Macbeth, when, speaking of the grooms who lay near Duncan, he says !

MACBETH.

One cry'd, God bless us ! and Amen ! the other ;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands,
Listening their fear. I could not say, Amen,
When they did say, God bless us !

These

These expressions open to us the internal state of the persons interested, and never fail to command our sympathy. Shakespear seems to have had the art of the Dervise, in the Arabian tales, who could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments, adopt his passions, and rise to all the functions and feelings of his situation.

Shakespear was born in a rank of life, in which men indulge themselves in a free expression of their passions, with little regard to exterior appearance. This perhaps made him more acquainted with the movements of the heart, and less knowing or observant of outward forms : against the one he often offends, he very rarely misrepresents the other. The French tragedians, on the contrary, attend not to the nature of the man whom they represent, but to the decorums of his rank : so that their best tragedies are made ridiculous, by changing the condition of the persons of the drama ; which could

not be so easily effected, if they spoke the language of passion, which in all ranks of men is much alike. This kind of exterior representation falls intirely short of the intention of the drama : and indted many plays are little more than poems rehearsed ; and the theatrical décorations are used rather to improve the spectacle, than to assist the drama of which the poet remains the apparent hero. We are told by a French critic, that the great pleasure of their audience arises from a reflection on the difficulty of rhyming in that language.—If that be the case, it is plain neither the French tragedians endeavour at, or their audience expect from them, the true perfections of drama. For, by the same rule, if Hercules was represented under the difficulties of performing any of the tasks enjoined by Eurystheus, the attention of the audience would not be engaged so much to the means by which he atchieved his heroic labours, as to the sweat and toil of the poet in his closet, in assorting male and female rhymes. We have already remarked, that the more we revert from the
stage

stage to the poet, the less we shall be affected by what is acted ; and therefore if the difficulty of rhyme, and its apparent difference from the common language of dialogue, be such, as continually to set the art and the artist before our eyes, the specific merit of a piece intended to conceal the poet, and represent certain persons and events, does not, in any degree, exist in such compositions. Sophocles certainly unfolds the fatal mystery of the birth of Œdipus with great art : but our interest in the play arises not from reflection on the conduct of the poet, but is the effect of his making us alternately hope and fear for this guiltless, unhappy man. We wait with trembling expectation for the answer of the oracle, and for the testimony of Phorbus, because we imagine that the destiny of Œdipus, and the fate of Thebes, depend on them : if we considered it merely as the contrivance of the poet, we should be as unconcerned at the unravelling of the plot, as about the explication of a riddle.

The affectation of elaborate art is certainly among the false refinements of the modern stage.—The first masters in theatrical representations made use of a diction, which united the harmony of verse to the easy and natural air of prose, and was suited to the movement, and bustle of action, being considered only as subservient to the fable, and not as the principal object of the poet or the audience.

The first endeavour of the poet should be to touch the heart, the next to mend it. What would the ancients say, who would not suffer even the inarticulate sounds of music to utter tones that might enervate the mind, if they could hear the stage, from whence issued precepts that awakened the magistrate, animated the chief, and improved the citizen, now giving lessons of love; and the dramatic art, no longer attempting to purge the passions by pity and terror, but by false delicacy divested of its power, and diverted from its end, melting
away

away in the strains of elegy and eclogue ? May we not venture to affirm such refinements to be rather abuse and degeneracy, than advances towards perfection ? These poets have plainly neglected the moral ends which were the object of the drama ; and the manner of conducting their tragedy seems no less a deviation from that which the great poets practised, and the best critics taught. If they have avoided monstrous errors and absurdities, it is but the common privilege of mediocrity to do so ; but let not mediocrity assume the airs and presumption of excellence and perfection, nor pretend to obtrude on others, as rules, any fantastical forms which affectation or fashion may have imposed on them.

It cannot be denied, but there should be some complaisance to the change of manners and opinions. Our delicacy would be justly offended, if the loud groans and nauseous wounds of Philoctetes were imitated on the stage ; but would good sense be less offended,

fended, if, in the conduct of the play, his fierce resentments of his wrongs, the noble frankness of the son of Achilles, and the crafty wiles of Ulysses, which are so finely exhibited in the tragedy of Sophocles, and so deeply interest us in the dispute for the arrows, were all neglected, in order to engage our attention to some love-scenes between Neoptolemus, and a fair nymph of Lemnos? Would the poet be excused by pleading the effeminacy and gallantry of an audience, who would not endure so unpleasing an object as a wounded man, nor attend to any contest but about a heart? In such a country the lyre should warble melting strains: but let not example teach us to fetter the energy, and enervate the nobler powers of the British muse, and of a language fit to express sublimer sentiments. The bleeding, sightless eyes of *Œdipus* are objects of too great horror for the spectator; but is not *Theseus*, in the midst of plagues and famine, adoring les beaux yeux of the princess *Dirce* as much an object of ridicule?

Fine

Fine dialogues of love, interwoven with a tale of incest and murder, would not have been endured in any country where taste had not been absolutely perverted. Mr. Voltaire has the candor to own this is a bad tragedy ; but Corneille tells us, it was his good fortune to find it the general opinion, that none of his pieces were composed with more art : so little was the dramatic art understood in the polite court of Louis XIV. The *Œdipus* of Corneille is so far below criticism, that I should not have taken any notice of it but as it was necessary to bring a strong proof of the depravity of taste in those times.

Mr. Voltaire has endeavoured to convince his countrymen, that the metaphysics of love, and the sophistry of politics, are not adapted to the theatre : but he durst not bring the story of *Œdipus* on the stage without some love-scenes ; and *Philoctetes*, the companion of *Hercules*, is introduced fighting
for

for the autumnal charms of Jocasta.—
One may surely say with her,

JOCASTA.

D'un lien charmant le soin tendre & timide

Ne dut point occuper le successeur d'Alcide.

Tragedy, thus converted into mere amorous ditty, drops all the ends of her institution, which were, says Sir P. Sydney *,
“ to open the greatest wounds, and to shew
“ forth the ulcers that are covered with
“ tissue ; to make kings fear to be tyrants,
“ tyrants to manifest their tyrannical humours ; that stirring the effects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the
“ uncertainty of this world, and upon how
“ weak foundations gilded roofs are build-
“ ed ; that maketh us know, qui sceptrum
“ sævus duro imperio regit, timet timentes,
“ metus in autorem redit.” The example
to the great ; the warnings to the people ;
all high and public precepts are neglected ;
and by making the interest of the play turn

* Defence of Poesy.

upon

upon the passion of love; to which the man, the prince, the hero, is made to sacrifice every other consideration, even private morals are corrupted. Of this we shall be perfectly convinced, if we compare the conduct and sentiments of Theseus, and of the unfortunate daughter of Jocasta, in *Antigone*, and *Œdipus Coloneus*, with the Theseus and Dirce of *Corneille*; where the enamoured pair disclaim all other regards and duties, human and divine, for the character of mere lovers. In this play, great violence is done to the character of the persons, to which Horace, and all good critics, prescribe a most exact adherence. And though the Romans, who had conquered all other nations, had the best right to prefer their own manners, and despise those of other countries, yet their critics inculcated the necessity of imitating those of the people represented.

The French tragedians not only deviate from the character of the individual represented, but even from the general character of the age and country. Theseus and Achilles

Achilles are not only unlike to Theseus and Achilles, but they are not Greeks. Sophocles and Euripides never introduce a hero who had appeared in the Iliad or Odyssey, without a strict attention to making him act suitably to the opinion conceived of him from those epic poems. When Ulysses, in the tragedy of Hecuba, comes to demand Polixena to be sacrificed, how admirably is his conduct suited to our conceptions of him ! He is cold, prudent, deaf to pity, blind to beauty, and to be moved only by consideration of the public weal. See him in the Iphigenia of Racine, on a similar occasion, where he tells Agamemnon, *he is ready to cry,*

Je suis pret de pleurer ;

and examine whether there appears any thing of Ulysses upon the stage but his name. Nor is there a greater resemblance between the French and Greek Achilles. Euripides paints him with a peculiar frankness and warmth of character, abhorrent of fraud, and highly provoked when he discovers his name has been used in a deceit. When he sees Iphigenia preferring the good of her country,

country, and an immortal fame, to the pleasures of life, he is then struck with sentiments so suitable to the greatness of his own mind ; and, in the style of a hero and a Greek, expresses how glad he should have been of such a bride. The Achillès of Racine is not distinguished from any young lover of spirit ; yet this is one of the best French tragedies.

It is usual to compliment Corneille with having added dignity to the Romans ; and he has undoubtedly given them a certain restrained elevation of sentiment and expression, which has perhaps a theatrical greatness : but this is not Roman dignity, nor suitable to the character of republicans ; for, as the excellent Bishop of Cambray observes *, history represents the Romans great and high in sentiment, but simple, modest, natural in words, and very unlike the bombast, turgid heroes of romance. A great man, says he, does not declaim like a comedian, his expressions in conversation are just and strong ; he

* Lettres sur l'Eloquence, &c.

utters nothing low, nor any thing pompous. Augustus Cæsar, represented to a barbarous audience, would command more respect, if seated on the Mogul's golden throne, sparkling with gems, than in the curule chair, to which power, not pomp, gave dignity. It is a degree of barbarism to ascribe nobleness of mind to arrogance of phrase, or influence of manners. There is a certain expression of style and behaviour which verges towards barbarism ; a state to which we may approach by roads that rise, as well as by those that fall. An European monarch would think it as unbecoming him to be styled light of the world, glory of nations, and such other swelling additions, assumed by the Asiatic princes, as to be called the tamer of horses, or the swift-footed, like the heroes of Homer.

Pere Brumoy seems to be very sensible of Corneille's misrepresentation of the Roman character, though he speaks of it in all the ambiguity of language which prudence could suggest, to one who was thwarting a national

nal opinion †. He talks of *un raffinement de fert * in the Romans, and asks, if they are of this globe, or spirits of a superior world? The Greeks of Racine, says he, are not indeed of that universe which belonged only to Corneille; but with what pleasure does he make us behold ourselves in the persons he presents to us! and how agreeably would the heroes of antiquity be surpris d to find themselves adorned by new manners, not indeed like their own, but which yet do not misbecome them!

It can hardly be supposed that a critic of Pere Brumoy's taste did not mean to convey an oblique censure in these observations. The tragic poet is not to let his Pegasus, like the Hippogriffe of Astolpho, carry him to the moon; he is to represent men such as they were; and, indeed, when the fable and manners do not agree, great improprieties and perfect incredibility ensue.

If a Grecian fable is chosen, Grecian

† Theatre Grec. par Brumoy.

D

manners

manners should accompany it. A superficial decorum is kept up if Agamemnon appears a great chief; but he should be a Greek chief too, if he is to sacrifice his daughter to Diana. The same magnanimity of sentiment might certainly have been found in Gustavus Adolphus, and in other generals; but then how monstrous would appear the great catastrophe of the play!

If Shakespear had not preserved the Roman character and sentiments, in his play of the Death of Julius Cæsar, we should have abhorred Brutus as an assassin, who by this artifice appears a tyrannicide: and had not Mr. Addison made Cato a patriot, according to the Roman mode, we should think he was mad for killing himself because Cæsar was likely to become perpetual dictator.

It is difficult to sympathize with a man's passions, without adopting, for the time, his opinions, customs, and prejudices: but it is certainly necessary to exhibit the man as strongly

strongly tinged with those prejudices and customs as possible.

To all but superficial critics, would it not appear as ridiculous to see Theseus and Achilles wear French manners as a French dress? A little reflection would shew it is more so: for there are relations between manners and sentiments, and none between dress and sentiment.

It is strange that painters, who are to give the mute inanimate figure, are required to be rigid observers of the *Costumi*, and the dramatic poet who is to imitate sentiment, discourse, and action, should be allowed to neglect them.

James F. Ford
Church St. N. York
May 1838

ON THE
HISTORICAL
D R A M A.

Nec minimum meruere decus, vestigia Græcæ
Auli deferere, et celebrare domestica facta.

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ON THE
HISTORICAL
D R A M A.

THOSE dramas of Shakespear, which he distinguishes by the name of his histories, being of an original kind and peculiar construction, cannot come within any rules which are prior to their existence. The office of the critic, in regard to poetry, is like that of the grammarian and rhetorician in respect to language : it is their business to shew why such and such modes of speech are proper and graceful, others improper and ungraceful : but they pronounce only on such words and expressions as are actually extant.

The rules of Aristotle were drawn from
D 4 the

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the tragedies of Æschylus, Sophocles, &c. Had that great critic seen a play so fashioned on the chronicles of his country, thus representative of the manners of the times, and characters of the most illustrious persons concerned in a series of important events, perhaps he would have esteemed such a sort of drama well worth his attention, as very peculiarly adapted to those ends which the Grecian philosophers proposed in popular entertainments. If it be the chief use of history, that it teaches philosophy by experience, this species of history must be allowed to be the best preceptor. The catastrophe of these plays is not derived from a vain and idle fable of the wrath of Juno, or the revenge of slighted Bacchus; nor is a man represented entangled in the web of fate, from which his virtues and his deities cannot extricate him: but here we are admonished to observe the consequences of pride and ambition, the tyrant's dangers and the traitor's fate. The sentiments and the manners, the passions and their consequences, are openly exposed and immediately united: the

On the HISTORICAL DRAMA. 57

the force and lustre of poetical language join with the weight and authority of history, to impress the moral lesson on the heart. The poet collects, as it were, into a focus those truths, which lie scattered in the diffuse volume of the historian, and kindles the flame of virtue, while he shews the miseries and calamities of vice.

The common interests of humanity make us attentive to every story that has an air of reality, but we are more affected if we know it to be true ; and the interest is still heightened if we have any relation to the persons concerned. Our noble countryman, Percy, engages us much more than Achilles, or any Grecian hero. The people for whose use these public entertainments should be chiefly intended, know the battle of Shrewsbury to be a fact : they are informed of what has passed on the banks of the Severn ; all that happened on the shore of the Scamander has to them the appearance of a fiction.

As

§8 *On the HISTORICAL DRAMA.*

As the misfortunes of nations as well as of individuals often arise from their peculiar dispositions, customs, prejudices, and vices, these home-born dramas are excellently calculated to correct them. The Grecian tragedies are so much established on their mythology as to be very improper on our stage. The passion of Phædra and the death of Hippolytus, occasioned by the interposition of Venus and Neptune, wear the apparent marks of fiction; and when we cease to believe, we cease to be affected.

The nature of the historical play gave scope to the extensive talents of Shakspeare. He had an uncommon felicity in painting manners and developing characters, which he could employ with peculiar grace and propriety, when he exhibited the chiefs in our civil wars. The great Earl of Warwick, Cardinal Beaufort, Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, the renowned Hotspur, were very interesting objects to their countrymen. Whatever shewed them in a strong light,
2 and

and represented them with sentiments and manners agreeable to their historical characters; and those things common fame had divulged of them, must have engaged the attention of the spectator, and assisted in that delusion of his imagination from whence his sympathies with the story must arise. We are affected by the catastrophe of a stranger, we lament the destiny of an *Œdipus*, and the misfortunes of an *Hecuba*; but the little peculiarities of character touch us only where we have some nearer affinity to the person than the common relation of humanity: not, unless we are particularly acquainted with the original character, can these distinguishing marks have the merit of heightening the resemblance and animating the portrait.

We are apt to consider *Shakespeare* only as a poet; but he is certainly one of the greatest moral philosophers that ever lived.

Euripides

Euripides was highly esteemed for the moral sentences with which he has interspersed the speeches in his tragedies ; and certainly many general truths are expressed in them with a sententious brevity. But he rather collects general opinions into maxims, and gives them a form which is easily retained by memory, than extracts any new observations from the characters in action, which every reader of penetration will find our author do continually ; and when he introduces a general maxim, it seems forced from him by the occasion. As it arises out of the action, it loses itself again in it, and remains not, as in other writers, an ambitious ornament glittering alone, but is so connected as to be an useful passage very naturally united with the story. The instances of this are so frequent as to occur almost in every scene of his best plays. But lest I should be misunderstood, I will quote one from the second part of Henry IV., where the general maxim is, that

An

On the HISTORICAL DRAMA. 61

An habitation giddy and unsure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.

YORK.

Let us on :

And publish the occasion of our arms.
The commonwealth is sick of their own choice :
Their over greedy love hath surfeited.
An habitation giddy and unsure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
Oh thou fond many ! with what loud applause,
Did'st thou beat heav'n with blessing Bolingbroke,
Before he was, what thou would'st have him be !
And now, being trim'd up in thine own desires,
Thou, beastly feeder, art so full of him,
That thou provok'st thyself to cast him up.
So, so, thou common dog, didst thou disgorge
Thy glutton bosom of the royal Richard,
And now thou wouldst eat thy dead vomit up,
And how'st to find it. What trust in these times ?
They that when Richard liv'd would have him die,
Are now become enamour'd on his grave :
Thou that throwd'st dust upon his goodly head,
When through proud London he came fighting on
After the admired heels of Bolingbroke,
Cry'st now, O earth, yield us that king again,
And take thou this.

Moral

Moral reflections may be more frequent in this kind of drama, than in the other species of tragedy, where, if not very short, they tease the spectator, whose mind is intent upon, and impatient for the catastrophe; and unless they arise necessarily out of the circumstances the person is in, they appear unnatural. For in the pressure of extreme distress, a person is intent only on himself, and on the present exigence. The various interests and characters in these historical plays, and the mixture of the comic, weaken the operations of pity and terror, but introduce various opportunities of conveying moral instruction, as occasion is given to a variety of reflections and observations, more useful in common life than those drawn from the conditions of kings and heroes, and persons greatly superior to us by nature or fortune.

As there are poets of various talents, and readers of various tastes, one would rather wish all the fields of Parnassus might be free
and

and open to men of genius, than that a proud and tyrannical spirit of criticism should controul us in the use of any of them. Those which we should have judged most barren, have brought forth noble productions, when cultivated by an able hand.

Even fairy land has produced the sublime; and the wild regions of romance have sometimes yielded just and genuine sentiments.

To write a perfect tragedy, a poet must be possessed of the pathetic or the sublime; or perhaps to attain the utmost excellence, must, by a more uncommon felicity, be able to give to the sublime the finest touches of passion and tenderness, and to the pathetic the dignity of the sublime. The straining a moderate or feeble genius to these arduous tasks, has produced the most absurd bombast, and the most pitiable nonsense that has ever been conceived. Aristotle's rules, like Ulysses' bow, are held forth to all pretenders to tragedy, who, as unfortunate as Penelope's

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Penelope's suitors, only betray their weakness by an attempt superior to their strength, or ill adapted to their faculties. Why should not poetry, in all her different forms, claim the same indulgence as her sister art? The nicest connoisseurs in painting have applauded every master, who has justly copied nature. Had Michael Angelo's bold pencil been dedicated to drawing the Graces, or Rembrandt's to trace the soft bewitching smile of Venus, their works had probably proved very contemptible. Fashion does not so easily impose on our senses as it misleads our judgment. Truth of design, and natural colouring, will always please the eye; we appeal not here to any set of rules, but in an imitative art require only just imitation, with a certain freedom and energy, which is always necessary to form a complete resemblance to the pattern which is borrowed from nature. I will own, the figures of gods and goddesses, graceful nymphs, and beautiful Cupids, are finer subjects for the pencil than ordinary human forms; yet if the painter imparts to these a resemblance
to

to celebrated persons, throws them into their proper attitudes, and gives a faithful copy of the *Costumi* of the age and country, his work will create sensations of a different, but not less pleasing kind than those excited by the admiration of exquisite beauty and perfect excellence of workmanship. Perhaps he should rather be accounted a nice virtuoso than a consummate critic, who prefers the poet or sculptor's fairest idea to the various and extensive merits of the historic representation.

Nothing great is to be expected from any set of artists, who are to give only copies of copies. The treasures of nature are inexhaustible, as well in moral as in physical subjects. The talents of Shakespear were universal, his penetrating mind saw through all characters; and, as Mr. Pope says of him, he was not more a master of our strongest emotions than of our idlest sensations.

One cannot wonder, that endued with so
F. great

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great and various powers, he broke down the barriers that had before confined the dramatic writers to the regions of comedy, or tragedy. He perceived the fertility of the subjects that lay between the two extremes; he saw, that in the historical play he could represent the manners of the whole people, give the general temper of the times, and bring in view the incidents that affected the common fate of his country. The Gothic muse had a rude spirit of liberty, and delighted in painting popular tumults, the progress of civil wars, and the revolutions of government, rather than a catastrophe within the walls of a palace. At the time he wrote, the wars of the Houses of York and Lancaster were fresh in mens minds. They had received the tale from some Nestor in their family, or neighbourhood, who had fought in the battle he related. Every spectator's affections were ranged under the white or red Rose, in whose contentions some had lost their parents and friends, others had gained establishments and honours.

All

All the inducements which the Greek tragedians had to chuse their heroes from the works of the poets who had sung the wars of Troy, and the Argonautic expedition, were still in greater force with our countryman to take his subjects from the history and traditions of those more recent transactions, in which the spectator was informed and interested more personally and locally. There was not a family so low, that had not had some of its branches torn off in the storms of these intestine commotions : nor a valley so happily retired, that at some time, *the foot of hostile paces had not bruised her flow'rets*. In these characters the rudest peasant read the sad history of his country, while the better sort were informed of the most minute circumstances by our chronicles. The tragedians who took their subjects from Homer, had all the advantage a painter would have, who was to draw a picture from a statue of Phidias or Praxiteles. Poor Shakespear from the wooden

E 2

images

images in our mean chronicles was to form his portraits. What judgment was there in discovering, that by moulding them to an exact resemblance he should engage and please ! And what discernment and penetration into characters, and what amazing skill in moral painting, to be able, from such uncouth models, to bring forth not only a perfect, but, when occasion required, a graceful likeness !

The patterns from whence he drew, were not only void of poetical spirit and ornament, but also of all historical dignity. The histories of these times were a mere heap of rude undigested annals, coarse in their style, and crowded with trivial anecdotes. No Tacitus had investigated the obliquities of our statesmen, or by diving into the profound secrets of policy had dragged into light the latent motives, the secret machinations of our politicians : yet how does he enter into the deepest mysteries of state ! There cannot be a stronger proof of
the

the superiority of his genius over the historians of the times than the following instance.

The learned Sir Thomas More in his history of Crook'd-Back Richard, tells, with the garrulity of an old nurse, the current stories of this king's deformity, and the monstrous appearances of his infancy, which he seems with superstitious credulity to believe to have been the omens and prognostics of his future villainy. Shakespear, with a more philosophic turn of mind, considers them, not as presaging, but as instigating his cruel ambition, and finely accounts in the following speeches for the asperity of his temper, and his fierce and unmitigated desire of dominion, from his being by his person disqualified for the softer engagements of society.

GLOUCESTER.

Well, say there is no kingdom then for Richard :

What other pleasure can the world afford ?

I'll make my heaven on a lady's lap ;

E 3

And

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And deck my body in gay ornaments,
 And 'twixt sweet ladies with my words and looks.
 Oh ! miserable thought ! and more unlikely,
 Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns.
 Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb,
 And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,
 She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe
 To shrink my arm like to a wither'd shrub ;
 To make an envious mountain on my back,
 Where fits deformity to mock my body ;
 To shape my legs of an uneven size ;
 To disproportion me in every part :
 Like to a chaos, or unlick'd bear-whelp
 That carries no impression like the dam.
 And am I then a man to be belov'd ?
 Oh monstrous fault to harbour such a thought !
 Then since the world affords no joy to me,
 But to command, to check, to o'er-bear such
 As are of better person than myself ;
 I'll make my heav'n to dream upon the crown,
 And while I live to account this world but hell,
 Until the mishap'd trunk that bears this head
 Be round impaled with a glorious crown.

[Henry VI. Act 3d, Scene 3d.

GLOUCESTER.

GLoucester.

The midwife wonder'd, and the women cry'd,
Oh Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth !
And so I was, which plainly signified
That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog :
Then since the heav'ns have flap'd my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother,
And that word, love, which grey-beards call divine,
Be-resent in men like one another,
And not in me : I am myself alone.

{ Henry VI. Act 5th, Scene 7th.

Our author by following minutely the chronicles of the times has embarrassed his drama's with too great a number of persons and events. The hurley-burley of these plays recommended them to a rude illiterate audience, who, as he says, loved a noise of targets. His poverty, and the low condition of the stage (which at that time was not frequented by persons of rank) obliged him to this complaisance ; and unfortunately he had not been tutored by any rules of art, or informed by acquaintance with just and regular drama's. Even the politer sort by

E 4

reading

72 *On the HISTORICAL DRAMA.*

reading books of chivalry, which were the polite literature of the times, were accustomed to bold adventures and atchievements. In our northern climates heroic adventures pleased more than the gallant dialogue, where love and honour dispute with all the sophistry of the schools, and one knows not when the contest would end, if heraldry did not step in and decide the point, as in the soliloquy of the Infanta in the Cid.

L'INFANTE.

T'écouterai-je encor, respect de ma naissance,

Qui fais un crime de mes feux ?

T'écouterai-je, amour, dont la douce puissance

Contre ce fier tyran fait rebeller mes vœux ?

Pauvre princesse, auquel des deux

Dois-tu prêter obéissance ?

Rodrigue, ta valeur te rend digne de moi ;

Mais pour être vaillant tu n'es pas fils de-roi.

Le Cid, Acte 5me.

Nor is this rule, that a princess can love only the son of a king, a mere Spanish punto ; you shall hear two Spartan virgins, daughters

ters of Lyfander, speaking the same language,

ELPINICE.

Cotys est roi, ma sœur ; & comme sa couronne

Parle suffisamment pour lui,

Affuré de mon cœur que son trône lui donne,

De le trop demander il s'épargne l'ennui.

This lady then proceeds to question her sister concerning her inclination for her lover Spitridates, and urges in his favour ;

ELPINICE.

Car enfin, Spitridate a l'entretien charmant,

L'œil vif, l'esprit aisé, le cœur bon, l'ame belle ;

A tant de qualités s'il joignait un vrai zèle. . .

To which the other answers,

AGLATIDE.

Ma sœur, il n'est pas roi comme l'est votre amant.

Il n'est pas roi, vous dis-je, & c'est un grand défaut *.

The Queen of the Lusitcanians, in the famous play of Sertorius, speaks thus to that Roman general ;

* Agesilaus of Corneille.

VIRITATE.

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VIRITATE.

Car enfin pour remplir l'honneur de ma naissance,
 Il me faudroit un roi de titre, et de puissance ;
 Mais comme il n'en est plus, je pense m'en devoir,
 Ou le pouvoir sans nom, ou le nom sans pouvoir.

And upon the effect of this prudent decision turns the great interest of the play. By the laws of romance the men are to be amorous, and the ladies ambitious. Poor Sertorius in his old age is in love with this lady, for whom Perpenna is also dying ; and Sertorius whom we had supposed sacrificed to the ambition of his lieutenant, is the victim of his jealousy.

Shakespear and Corneille are equally blamable, for having complied with the bad taste of the age ; and by doing so, they have both brought unmerited censures on their country. The French impute barbarity and cruelty, to a people that could delight in bloody skirmishes on the stage. The English, as unjustly, but as excusably, accuse of effeminacy and frivolousness, those
 who

On the HISTORICAL DRAMA. 75

who could fit to hear the following address of a lover to his mistress's bodkin, with which she had just put out one of his eyes :

P Y M A N T E.

O toi, qui secendant son courage inhumain,
Loin d'orner ses cheveux, deshonores sa main,
Exécration instrument de sa brutale rage,
Tu devais pour le moins respecter son image :
Ce portrait accompli d'un chef-d'œuvre des cieux ;
Imprimé dans mon cœur, exprimé dans mes yeux,
Quoi que te commandât une âme si cruelle,
Devait être adoré de ta pointe rebelle.

Clitandre de Corneille.

The whole soliloquy includes seventy lines. I heartily wish for the honour of both nations, the lover and his bodkin, and the soldiers and their halberds, had always been hissed off the stage. Our countryman was betrayed into his error by want of judgment, to discern what part of his story was not fit for representation. Corneille, for want of dramatic genius, was obliged to have recourse to points, conceits, cold and uninteresting declamations, to fill up his plays,

and these heavily drag along his undramatical drama's to a fifth act.

The ignorance of the times passed over the defects of each author; and the bad taste then prevalent did more than endure, it even encouraged and approved what should have been censured.

Mr. Voltaire has said, that the plots of Shakespear's plays are as wild as that of the *Clitandre* just quoted; and it must be allowed they are often exceptionable, but at the same time we must observe, that though crowded too much, they are not so perplexed as to be unintelligible, which Corneille confesses his *Clitandre* might be to those who saw it but once. There is still another more essential difference perhaps, which is, that the wildest and most incorrect pieces of our poet contain some incomparable speeches: whereas the worst plays of Corneille have not a good stanza. The tragedy of *King Lear* is very far from being a regular piece, yet there are speeches
in

in it which perhaps excel any thing that has been written by any tragedian, ancient or modern. However we will only compare one passage of it at present, with another in *Clitandre* ; as they both happen to be on similar subjects. The blinded lover, after many complaints, and wishes for revenge, hears the noise of a tempest, and thus he breaks out :

PYMANTE.

Mes menaces déjà font trembler tout le monde :

Le vent fuit d'épouvante, et le tonnetre en gronde :

L'œil du ciel s'en retire, et par un voile noir,

N'y pouvant résister, se défend d'en rien voir.

Cent nuages épais se distillant en larmes,

A force de pitié, veulent m'ôter les armes.

La nature étonnée embrasse mon courroux,

Et veut m'offrir Dorise, ou devancer mes coups.

Tout est de mon parti, le ciel même n'envoie

Tant d'éclairs redoublés, qu'afin que je la voie.

King Lear, whom age renders weak and querulous, and who is now beginning to grow mad, thus very naturally, in the general calamity of the storm, recurs to his own particular circumstances.

LEAR.

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LEAR.

Spit fire, spout rain ;
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters ;
I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdoms, call'd you children,
You owe me no submission. Then let fall
Your horrible pleasure ; here I stand your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man !
And yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high engender'd battles, 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. Oh ! oh ! 'tis foul.
They must have little feeling that are not
touched by this speech, so highly pathetic.

How fine is that which follows !

LEAR.

Let the great Gods,
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipt of justice ! Hide thee thou bloody hand,
Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue,
That art incestuous ! Caitiff, shake to pieces,
That under covert, and convenient seeming,

Hast

Hast practis'd on man's life ! Close pent up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and ask
'These dreadful summonners grace !——I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning.

Thus it is Shakespear redeems the nonsense, the indecorums, the irregularities of his plays ; and whoever, for want of natural taste, or ignorance in the English language, is insensible to the merit of these passages, is just as unfit to judge of his works, as a deaf man, who only perceived the blackness of the sky, and did not hear the deep-voiced thunder, and the roaring elements, would have been to have described the awful horrors of this midnight storm.

The French critic apologizes for our persisting in the representation of Shakespear's plays, by saying we have none of a more regular form. In this he is extremely mistaken ; we have many plays written according to the rules of art ; but nature, which speaks in Shakespear, prevails over them all. If at one of our theatres there was a
set

set of actors who gave the true force of every sentiment, expressed justly every emotion of the heart, seemed inspired with the passion they were to counterfeit, fell so naturally into the circumstances and situations the poet had appointed for them, that they never betrayed they were actors, but sometimes would have an awkward gesture, or for a moment a vicious pronunciation, should we not constantly resort thither?— If at another theatre there were a set of puppets regularly featured, exactly proportioned, whose movements were geometrically just, that spoke through an organ so constituted by a great master of music as never to give any harsh or disagreeable tones, and the faces, the action, the pronunciation of these puppets had no fault, but that there was no expression in their countenance, no natural air in their motion, and that their speech had not the various inflexions of the human voice, would a real connoisseur abandon the living actors for such lifeless images, because some nice and dainty critic pleaded,

pleaded, that the puppets were not subject to any human infirmities, would not cough, sneeze, or become hoarse in the midst of a fine period? or could it avail much to urge that their movements and tones, being directed by just mechanics, would never betray the awkwardness of rusticity, or a false accent caught from bad education.

Shakespear's *dramatis personæ* are men, frail by constitution, hurt by ill habits, faulty and unequal. But they speak with human voices, are actuated by human passions, and are engaged in the common affairs of human life. We are interested in what they do, or say, by feeling every moment, that they are of the same nature as ourselves. Their precepts therefore are an instruction, their fates and fortunes an experience, their testimony an authority, and their misfortunes a warning.

Love and ambition are the subjects of the French plays. From the first of these passions

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many

many from age and temper are entirely exempted; and from the second many more, by situation, are excluded. Among a thousand spectators, there are not perhaps half a dozen, who ever were, or can be, in the circumstances of the persons represented: they cannot sympathize with them, unless they have some conception of a tender passion, combated by ambition, or ambition struggling with love. The fable of the French plays is often taken from history, but then a romantic passion is added to it, and to which both events and characters are rendered subservient.

Shakespear, in various nature wise, does not confine himself to any particular passion. When he writes from history, he attributes to the persons such sentiments as agreed with their actions and characters. There is not a more sure way of judging of the merit of rival geniuses, than to bring them to the test of comparison where they have attempted subjects that have any resemblance. Corneille appears much inferior to our Shakespear

appear in the art of conducting the events, and displaying the characters he borrows from the historian's page; his tragedy of *Otho* comprehends that period in which his courtiers are caballing to make him adopt a successor agreeable to their interests.

The court of that emperor is finely described by Tacitus, who in a few words sets before us the insolence, the profligacy, and rapaciousness of a set of ministers, encouraged by the weakness of the prince to attempt whatever they wished, and incited by his age to snatch by hasty rapine whatever they coveted. — Tacitus, with his masterly pencil, has drawn the outlines of their characters so strongly, that a writer of any genius might finish up the portraits to great resemblance and perfection. One had surely a right to expect this from an author, who professes to have copied this great historian the most faithfully that was possible. One would imagine the insolent *Martianus*, the bold and subtle *Vinius*, the

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base,

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base, scandalous, slothful. Laco should all appear in their proper characters, which would be unfolding through the whole progress of the play, as their various schemes and interests were exposed. Instead of this, Martianus makes submissive love: Vinus and Laco are two ambitious courtiers, without any quality that distinguishes them from each other, or from any other intriguing statesmen; nor do they at all contribute to bring about the revolution in the empire: their whole business seems to be match-making, and in that too they are so unskilful as not to succeed. They undertake it indeed, merely as it may influence the adoption. Several sentences from Tacitus are ingrafted into the dialogues, but, from a change of persons and circumstances, they lose much of their original force and beauty.

Galba addresses to his niece, who is in love with Otho, the fine speech which the historian supposes him to have made to Piso when he adopted him. The love-sick lady, tired of an harangue, the purport of which
is

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Church
April 58.

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is unfavorable to her lover, and being besides no politician, answers the emperor, that she does not understand state-affairs : a cruel reply to a speech he could have no motive for making, but to display his wisdom and eloquence. The old warrior is more complaisant to her, for he enters into all the delicacies of her passion, as if he had studied *la carte du tendre**. To steal so much matter from Tacitus without imbibing one spark of his spirit; to translate whole speeches, yet preserve no likeness in the characters, is surely betraying a great deficiency of dramatic powers, and of the art of imitation : to represent the gay, luxurious, dissolute, ambitious Otho, the courtier of Nero, and the gallant of Poppea, as a mere Pastor Fido, who would die rather than be inconstant to his mistress, and is indifferent to empire but for her sake, is such a violation of historical truth, as is not to be endured. I pass over the absurd scene between the jealous ladies, the improbability of their treating the powerful and haughty favorites of the emperor

* Roman de Clelie.

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with indignity, and Otho's thrice repeated attempt to kill himself before his mistress's face without the least reason why he should put an end to his life, or probability that she would suffer him to do it. To make minute criticisms where the great parts are so defective would be trifling.

Having observed how poorly Corneille has represented characters borrowed from so great a portrait painter as Tacitus, let us now see what Shakespear has done, from those awkward originals our old chronicles.

T H E

THE
FIRST PART
OF
HENRY IV.

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THE
FIRST PART
OF
HENRY IV.

THE peculiar dexterity with which the author unfolds the characters, and prepares the events of this play, deserves our attention.

There is not perhaps any thing more difficult in the whole compass of the dramatic art, than to open to the spectator the previous incidents that were productive of the present circumstances, and the characters of the persons from whose conduct in such circumstances the subsequent events are to flow. An intelligent spectator will receive great pleasure from observing every action
naturally

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naturally arising out of the sentiments and manners of the persons represented. Hap-pier is the poet, the perplexities of whose fable are unfolded by the natural operation of the dispositions of the persons who compose it, than even he, to whom it is permitted to call a deity to his assistance. This play opens by the king's declaring his intention to undertake the crusade as soon as peace will allow him to do it. Westmorland in-forms him of the defeat of Mortimer by Owen Glendower; the King relates the news of Percy's victory at Holmedon, which na-turally leads him to the praise of this young hero, and to express an envy of Lord Nor-thumberland's happiness

To be the father of so blest a son,
While I (says he)
See riot and dishonour stain the brow
Of my young Harry:

then he mentions Percy's refusal of his pri-soners, which Westmorland attributes to the malevolent suggestions of Worcester. Thus at once is presented to the spectator, the condition of the state, the temper of the times,

times, and the characters of the persons from whence the catastrophe is to arise.

The stern authority the king assumes on Hotspur's disobedience to his commands, could not fail to inflame a warm young hero flushed with recent victory, and elate with the consciousness of having so well defended a crown which his father and uncle had in a manner conferred. Nothing can be more natural than that, in such a temper, he should recur to the obligations the king had received from his family : and thus while he seems venting his spleen, he explains to the spectator what is past, and opens the source of the future rebellion ; and by connecting former transactions with the present passions and events, creates in the reader an interest and a sympathy which a cold narration or a pompous declamation could not have effected. As the author designed Percy should be an interesting character, his disobedience to the king, in regard to the prisoners, is mitigated by his pleading the unfitness of the person and unfavorableness of the occasion.

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sion to urge him on the subject. To this effeminate courtier (says he)

I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,
Out of my grief and my impatience
To be so pestered with a poppingjoy,
Answer'd neglectingly—I know not what.

Thus has the poet divested the rebel of the hateful crimes of premeditated revolt and deep-laid treachery. He is hurried by an impetuosity of soul out of the sphere of obedience, and, like a comet, though dangerous to the general system, he is still an object of admiration and wonder to every beholder. It is marvellous that Shakespear from bare chronicles, coarse history, and traditional tales, could thus extract the wisdom and caution of the politician Henry, and catch the fire of the martial spirit of Hotspur. The wrath of Achilles in Homer is not sustained with more dignity. Each hero is offended that the prize of valour,

Due to many a well-fought day,
is rudely snatched from him by the hand of power.—One should suspect an author of more

more learning to have had the character of Achilles in his eye, and also the advice of Horace in the manner of representing him on the stage.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.

Jura neget sibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

His misdemeanors rise so naturally out of his temper, and that temper is so noble, that we are almost as much interested for him as for a more virtuous character.

His trespasss may be well forgot,

It hath th' excuse of youth and heat of blood,

And an adopted name of privilege,

A hare-brain'd Hotspur govern'd by a spleen.

The great aspiring soul of Hotspur bears out rebellion : it seems, in him, to flow from an uncontrollable energy of soul, born to give laws, too potent to receive them. In every scene he appears with the same animation ; he is always that Percy

Whose spirit lent a fire

Even to the dullest peasant in the camp,

Led ancient lords and rev'rend bishops on,

To bloody battles and to bruising arms.

He

He has too the frankness of Achilles, and the same abhorrence of falsehood; he is as impatient of Glendower's pretensions to supernatural powers, as to the king's assuming a right over his prisoners. In dividing the kingdom he will not yield a foot of ground to those who dispute with him; but would give any thing to a well-deserving friend. It is a pardonable violation of historical truth, to give the Prince of Wales, who behaved very gallantly at the battle of Shrewsbury, the honour of conquering him; and it is more agreeable to the spectator, as the event was, to beat down

The never-daunted Percy to the earth,
to suppose it did not happen from the arrow of a peasant, but from the sword of Henry Montmouth, whose spirit came with a higher commission from the same fiery sphere.

In Worcester the rebel appears in all his odious colours; proud, envious, malignant, artful, he is finely contrasted by the noble Percy. Shakespear, with the sagacity of a Tacitus,

Tacitus, observes the jealousies which must arise between a family, which has conferred a crown, and the king who has received it, who will always think the presence of such benefactors *too bold and peremptory*.

The character of Henry IV. is perfectly agreeable to that given him by historians. The play opens by his declaring his intentions to war against the infidels, which he does not undertake, as was usual in those times, from a religious enthusiasm, but is induced to it by political motives: that the martial spirit may not break out at home in civil wars; nor peace and idleness give men opportunity to enquire into his title to the crown, and too much discuss a point which would not bear a cool and close examination. Henry had the specious talents, which assist a man under certain circumstances to usurp a kingdom, but either from the want of those great and solid qualities, which are necessary to maintain opinion loyal to the throne to which it had raised him, or from the impossibility of satisfying the expectations of those

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those who had assisted his usurpation, as some of the best historians with great appearance of reason have suggested *, it is certain his reign was full of discontents and troubles.

The popular arts by which he captivated the multitude, are finely described in the speech he makes to his son, in the third act. Any other poet would have thought he had acquitted himself well enough in that dialogue, by a general fatherly admonition delivered with the dignity becoming a monarch: but Shakespear rarely deals in commonplace, and general morals. The peculiar temper and circumstances of the person, and the exigency of the time, influence the speaker as in real life. It is not only the king and parent, but Henry Plantagenet, that chides the Prince of Wales. How natural is it for him, on Percy's revolt, to recur to his own rebellion against Richard, and to apprehend that the same levities which lost that king, first the opinion, then

* Hume's Hist. of H. IV.

the allegiance of his subjects, should deprive the Prince of his succession ! Nothing can be better imagined than the parallel he draws between himself and Percy, Richard and Henry of Monmouth. The affectionate father, the offended king, the provident politician, and the conscious usurper, are all united in the following speeches :

K. HENRY.

I know not, whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done ;
That, in his secret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement, and a scourge for me.
But thou do'st in thy passages of life
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance and the rod of heav'n,
To punish my mis-treadings. Tell me, else
Could such inordinate and low desires,
Such poor, such base, such lewd, such mean attempts,
Such barren pleasures, rude society
As thou art match'd withal, and grafted to,
Accompany the greatness of thy blood,
And hold their level with thy princely heart ?

G

K. HENRY.

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K. HENRY.

Heav'n pardon thee. Yet let me wonder, Harry,
 At thy affections, which do hold a wing
 Quite from the flight of all thy ancestors.
 Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,
 Which by thy younger brother is supply'd ;
 And art almost an alien to the hearts
 Of all the court and princes of my blood.
 The hope and expectation of thy time
 Is ruin'd, and the soul of every man
 Prophetically does fore-think thy fall.
 Had I so lavish of my presence been,
 So common-hackney'd in the eyes of men,
 So stale and cheap to vulgar company ;
 Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
 Had still kept loyal to possession,
 And left me in reputable banishment,
 A fellow of no mark, nor likelihood.
 But being seldom seen, I could not stir,
 But, like a comet, I was wonder'd at,
 That men would tell their children, this is he ;
 Others would say, where ? which is Bolingbroke ?
 And then I stole all courtesy from heav'n,
 And dress'd myself in much humility,
 That I did pluck allegiance from mens hearts,

Loud

The First Part of HENRY IV. 99

Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king.
Thus I did keep my person fresh and new,
My presence, like a robe pontifical,
Ne'er seen, but wonder'd at; and so my state,
Seldom, but sumptuous, shew'd like a feast,
And won, by rareness, such solemnity.
The skipping king, he ambled up and down
With shallow jesters, and rash bayin wits,
Soon kindled, and soon burnt; 'scarded his state,
Mingled his royalty with carping fools;
Had his great name profaned with their scorns;
And gave his countenance, against his name,
To laugh at gybing boys, and stand the push
Of every beardless, vain comparative;
Grew a companion to the common streets,
Enfeoff'd himself to popularity.
That, being daily swallow'd by mens eyes,
They surfeited with honey, and began
To loath a taste of sweetness; whereof a little
More than a little, is by much too much.
So when he had occasion to be seen,
He was but as the cuckow is in June,
Heard, not regarded; seen, but with such eyes,
As, sick and blunted with community,

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Afford no extraordinary gaze ;
 Such, as is bent on sun-like majesty,
 When it shines seldom in admiring eyes ;
 But rather drowz'd, and hung their eye-lids down,
 Slept in his face, and rendred such aspect
 As cloudy men use to their adversaries,
 Being with his presence glutted, gorg'd and full.
 And in that very line, Harry, stand'st thou ;
 For thou hast lost thy princely privilege
 With vile participation ; not an eye,
 But is a-weary of thy common sight,
 Save mine, which hath desir'd to see thee more ;
 Which now doth, what I would not have it do,
 Make blind itself with foolish tenderness.

Our author is so little under the discipline of art, that we are apt to ascribe his happiest successes, as well as his most unfortunate failings, to chance. But I cannot help thinking, there is more of contrivance and care in his execution of this play, than in almost any he has written. It is a more regular drama than his other historical plays, less charged with absurdities, and less involved in confusion. It is indeed liable to those

those objections which are made to tragi-comedy. But if the pedantry of learning could ever recede from its dogmatical rules, I think that this play, instead of being condemned for being of that species, would obtain favour for the species itself, though perhaps correct taste may be offended with the transitions from grave and important, to light and ludicrous subjects, and more still with those from great and illustrious, to low and mean persons. Foreigners unused to these compositions will be much disgusted at them. The vulgar call all animals that are not natives of their own country, monsters, however beautiful they may be in their form, or wisely adapted to their climate and natural destination. The prejudices of pride are as violent and unreasonable as the superstitions of ignorance. On the French Parnassus, a tragi-comedy of this kind will be deemed a monster fitter to be shewn to the people at a fair, than exhibited to circles of the learned and polite. From some peculiar circumstances

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relating to the characters in this piece, we may, perhaps, find a sort of apology for the motley mixture thrown into it. We cannot but suppose, that at the time it was written, many stories yet subsisted of the wild adventures of this Prince of Wales, and his idle companions. His subsequent reformation, and his conquests in France, rendered him a very popular character. It was a delicate affair to expose the follies of Henry V. before a people proud of his victories, and tender of his fame, at the same time so informed of the extravagancies and excesses of his youth, that he could not appear divested of them with any degree of historical probability. Their enormity would have been greatly heightened, if they had appeared in a piece entirely serious and full of dignity and decorum. How happily therefore was the character of Falstaffe introduced, whose wit and festivity in some measure excuse the Prince for admitting him into his familiarity, and suffering himself to be led by him into some irregularities. There is hardly a young
hero,

hero, full of gaiety and spirits, who, if he had once fallen into the society of so pleasant a companion, could have the severity to discard him, or would not say, as the Prince does,

He could better spare a better man.

How skilfully does our author follow the tradition of the Prince's having been engaged in a robbery, yet make his part in it a mere frolic to play on the cowardly and braggart temper of Falstaffe! The whole conduct of that incident is very artful: he rejects the proposal of the robbery, and only complies with playing a trick on the robbers; and care is taken to inform you, that the money is returned to its owners.—The Prince seems always diverted, rather than seduced by Falstaffe; he despises his vices while he is entertained by his humour: and though Falstaffe is for a while a stain upon his character, yet it is of a kind with those colours, which are used for a disguise in sport, being of such a nature as are easily washed out, without leaving any bad tincture. And we see Henry, as soon as he is

called to the high and serious duties of a king, come forth at once with unblemished majesty. The disposition of the hero is made to pierce through the idle frolics of the boy, throughout the whole play ; for his reformation is not effected in the last scene of the last act, as is usual in our comedies, but is prepared from the very beginning of the play. The scene between the Prince and Francis, is low and ridiculous, and seems one of the greatest indecorums in the piece ; at the same time the attentive spectator will find the purpose of it is to shew him, that Henry was studying human nature, in all her variety of tempers and faculties. I am now, says he, acquainted with all humours, (meaning dispositions) since the days of good man Adam to the present hour. In the play of Henry V. you are told, that in his youth he had been sedulously observing mankind ; and from an apprehension, perhaps, how difficult it was to acquire an intimate knowledge of men, whilst he kept up the forms his rank prescribed, he waved the ceremonies and decorums of his situation, and

and familiarly conversed with all orders of society.—The jealousy his father had conceived of him would probably have been increased, if he had affected such a sort of popularity as would have gained the esteem and love of the multitude.

Whether Henry in the early part of his life was indulging a humour that inclined him to low and wild company, or endeavouring to acquire a deeper and more extensive knowledge of human nature, by a general acquaintance with mankind, it is the business of his historians to determine. But a critic must surely applaud the dexterity of Shakespeare for throwing this colour over that part of his conduct, whether he seized on some intimations historians had given of that sort, or, of himself imagined so respectable a motive for the Prince's deviations from the dignity of his birth. This piece must have delighted the people at the time it was written, as the follies of their favourite character were so managed, that they rather seemed

seemed foils to set off its virtues, than stains which obscured them.

Whether we consider the character of Falstaffe as adapted to encourage and excuse the extravagancies of the Prince, or by itself, we must certainly admire it, and own it to be perfectly original.

The professed wit, either in life or on the stage, is usually severe and satirical. But mirth is the source of Falstaffe's wit. He seems rather to invite you to partake of his merriment, than to attend to his jest; a person must be ill-natured, as well as dull, who does not join in the mirth of this jovial companion, who is in all respects the best calculated to raise laughter of any that ever appeared on a stage.

He joins the finesse of wit with the drollery of humour. Humour is a kind of grotesque wit, shaped and coloured by the disposition of the person in whom it resides, or by the subject to which it is applied. It
is

is ofteneft found in odd and irregular minds: but this peculiar turn diftorts wit, and though it gives it a burlefque air, which excites momentary mirth, renders it lefs juft, and confequently lefs agreeable to our judgments. Gluttony, corpulency, and cowardice, are the peculiarities of Falftaff's compofition, they render him ridiculous without folly, throw an air of jeft and feftivity about him, and make his manners fuit with his sentiments, without giving to his underftanding any particular bias. As the contempt attendant on thefe vices and defects is the beft antidote againft any infection that might be caught in his fociety, fo it was very fkilful to make him as ridiculous as witty, and as contemptible as entertaining. The admirable fpeech upon honour would have been both indecent and dangerous from any other perfon. We muft every where allow his wit is juft, his humour genuine, and his character perfectly original, and fufained through every fcene, in every play, in which it appears.

As

As Falstaffe, whom the author certainly intended to be perfectly witty, is less addicted to quibble and play on words, than any of his comic characters, I think we may fairly conclude, our author was sensible it was but a false kind of wit, which he practised from the hard necessity of the times : for in that age, the professor quibbled in his chair, the judge quibbled on the bench, the prelate quibbled in the pulpit, the statesman quibbled at the council-board ; nay even majesty quibbled on the throne.

THE

THE
SECOND PART
OF
HENRY IV.

T H E
S E C O N D P A R T
O F
H E N R Y IV.

IT is uncommon to find the same spirit and interest diffused through the sequel as in the first part of a play : but the fertile and happy mind of Shakespear could create or diversify at pleasure ; could produce new characters or vary the attitudes of those before exhibited according to the occasion. He leaves us in doubt, whether most to admire the fecundity of his imagination in the variety of its productions, or the strength and steadiness of his genius in sustaining the spirit, and preserving unimpaired, through various circumstances and situations, what his invention had originally produced.

We shall hardly find any man to-day; more like to what he was yesterday, than the persons here are like to what they were in the first part of Henry IV. This is the more astonishing as the author has not confined himself, as all other dramatic writers have done, to a certain theatrical character; which, formed entirely of one passion, presents to us always the patriot, the lover, or the conqueror. These, still turning on the same hinge, describe like a piece of clock-work a regular circle of movements. In human nature, of which Shakespear's characters are a just imitation, every passion is controlled and forced into many deviations by various incidental dispositions and humours. The operations of this complicated machine are far more difficult to trace, than the steady undeviating line of the artificial character formed on one simple principle. Our poet seems to have as great an advantage over ordinary dramatic poets, as Dædalus had above his predecessors in sculpture. They could make a representation of the
limbs

The Second Part of HENRY IV. 113

limbs and features which compose the human form, he first had the skill to give it gesture, attitude, the easy graces of real life, and exhibit its powers in a variety of exertions.

We shall again see Northumberland timid and wavering, forward in conspiracy, yet hesitating to join in an action of doubtful issue.

King Henry is as prudent a politician on his death-bed as at council; his eye, just before it closed for ever, stretching itself beyond the hour of death, to the view of those dangers, which from the temper of the Prince of Wales, and the condition of the times, threatened his throne and family. I cannot help taking notice of the remarkable attention of the poet to the cautious and politic temper of Henry, when he makes him, even in speaking to his friends and partisans, dissemble so far, in relating Richard's prophecy that Northumberland who helped

H

him

114 *The Second Part of HENRY IV.*

him to the throne would one day revolt from him, as to add,

Though then, heaven knows, I had no such intent ;

But that necessity fo'bow'd the state,

That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss.

To his successor he expresses himself very differently when he says,

Heaven knows, my son,

By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways

I met this crown.

These delicacies of conduct lie hardly within the poet's province, but have their source in that great and universal capacity which the attentive reader will find to belong to our author beyond any other writer. He alone, perhaps, would have perceived the decorum and fitness of making so wise a man reserved even with his friends, and trust a confession of the iniquities by which he obtained the crown only to his successor, whose interest it was not to disgrace whatever

3

The Second Part of HENRY IV. 115

ever could authorize his attainment of it. Let tragedy-writers who make princes prate with pages and waiting-women of their murders and treasons, learn for once, from rude and illiterate Shakespear, how averse pride is coolly to confess, and prudence to betray, what the fever and deliriums of ambition had prompted to do.

Falstaffe appears with his former dispositions, but in new situations; and entertains us in a variety of scenes.

Hotspur is as it were revived to the spectator in the following character given of him by his lady, when she dissuades Northumberland from joining the forces of the archbishop.

Lady PERCY.

Oh, yet for heav'n's sake, go not to these wars.
The time was, father, that you broke your word,
When you were more endear'd to it than now;
When your own Percy, when my heart-dear Harry,
Threw many a northward look, to see his father
Bring up his pow'rs; but he did long in vain!

H 2

Who

116 *The Second Part of HENRY IV.*

Who then persuaded you to stay at home ?

There were two honours lost ; yours and your son's.

For yours, may heav'nly glory brighten it !

For his, it struck upon him as the sun

In the grey vault of heav'n ; and by his light.

Did all the chivalry of England move

To do brave acts. He was indeed the glass

Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.

He had no legs, that practis'd not his gait ;

And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,

Became the accents of the valiant ;

For those, that could speak low and tardily,

Would turn their own perfection to abuse,

To seem like him : So that in speech, in gait,

In diet, in affections of delight,

In military rules, humours of blood,

He was the mark and glass, copy and book,

That fashion'd others. And him, wond'rous him !

O miracle of men ! him did you leave

To look upon the hideous god of war

In disadvantage ; to abide a field

Where nothing but the sound of Hotspur's name

Did seem defensible. So you left him.

Never, O, never do his ghost the wrong,

To hold your honour more precise and nice

With

The Second Part of HENRY IV. 117

With others, than with him. Let them alone :

The marshal and the archbishop are strong.

Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,

To day might I (hanging on Hotspur's neck)

Have talk'd of Monmouth's grave.

Justice Shallow is an admirably well drawn comic character, but he never appears better, than by reflection in the mirror of Falstaffe's wit, in whose descriptions he is most strongly exhibited.—It is said by some, that the justice was meant for a particular gentleman who had prosecuted the author for deer-stealing, I know not whether that story be well grounded. The Shallows are to be found every where, in every age, but those who have least character of their own, are most formed and modified by the fashion of the times, and their peculiar profession or calling. So though we often meet with a resemblance to this justice, we shall never find an exact parallel to him now manners are so much changed.—The superior danger of a rebellion sanctified by the church, cannot by historians or philosophers be better

118 *The Second Part of HENRY IV.*

set forth than by the following words of Morton :

MORTON.

The gentle Archbishop of York is up
 With well appointed powers. He is a man,
 Who with a double surety binds his followers.
 My lord, your son had only but the corps,
 But shadows, and the shews of men to fight ;
 For that same word, rebellion, did divide
 The action of their bodies from their souls,
 And they did fight with queasiness, constrain'd,
 As men drink potions, that their weapons only
 Seem'd on our side, but for their spirits and souls,
 This word, rebellion, it had froze them up,

But now, the bishop
 Turns insurrection to religion ;
 Suppos'd sincere and holy in his thoughts,
 He's follow'd both with body and with mind,
 And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
 Of fair King Richard, scrap'd from Pomfret stones ;
 Derives from heav'n his quarrel and his cause ;
 Tells them, he doth bestride a bleeding land
 Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke,
 And more, and less, do flock to follow him.

Nor

Nor can the indecency of a prelate's appearing in arms, and the abuse of an authority derived from the sacred function, be more strongly arraigned, than in the speeches of Westmorland, and John of Lancaster.

WESTMORLAND.

Then, my lord,
Unto your grace do I in chief address
The substance of my speech. If that rebellion
Came like itself, in base and abject routs,
Led on by bloody youth, goaded with rage,
And countenanc'd by boys and beggary;
I say, if damn'd commotion so appear'd
In his true, native, and most proper shape,
You, reverend father, and these noble lords,
Had not been here to dress the ugly form
Of base and bloody insurrection
With your fair honours. You, my lord archbishop,
Whose see is by a civil peace maintain'd,
Whose beard the silver hand of peace hath touch'd,
Whose learning and good letters peace hath tutor'd,
Whose white investments figure innocence,
The dove and very blessed spirit of peace;

H 4

Wherefore

120 *The Second Part of HENRY IV.*

Wherefore do you so ill translate yourself,
 - Out of the speech of peace, that bears such grace,
 - Into the harsh and boist'rous tongue of war?

LANCASTER.

• My lord of York, it better shew'd with you,
 When that your flock, assembled by the bell,
 Encircled you, to hear with reverence
 Your exposition on the holy text ;
 Than now to see you here, an iron man,
 Cheering a rout of rebels with your drum,
 Turning the word to sword, and life to death:
 That man that sits within a monarch's heart,
 And ripens in the sun-shine of his favour,
 Would he abuse the count'nance of the king,
 Alack, what mischiefs might he set abroad,
 In shadow of such greatness? With you, lord bishop,
 It is ev'n so: Who hath not heard it spoken,
 How deep you were within the books of heav'n?
 To us, the speaker in his parliament,
 To us, th' imagin'd voice of heav'n itself,
 The very opener and intelligencer
 Between the grace, the sanctities of heav'n,
 And our dull workings: O, who shall believe
 But you misuse the reverence of your place,

Employ

The Second Part of HENRY IV. 121.

Employ the countenance and grace of heav'n,
As a false favourite doth his prince's name,
In deeds dishonourable? You've taken up,
Under the counterfeited zeal of God,
The subjects of his substitute, my father;
And both against the peace of heav'n and him
Have here up-swarm'd them.

The archbishop of York, even when he appears an iron man, keeps up the gravity and seeming sanctity of his character, and wears the mitre over his helmet. He is not like Hotspur, or a valiant rebel, full of noble anger and fierce defiance, he speaks like a cool politician to his friends, and like a deep designing hypocrite to his enemies, and pretends he is only acting as physician to the state.

I have before observed that Shakespear had the talents of an orator as much as of a poet; and I believe it will be allowed the speeches of Westmorland and Lancaster are as proper on this occasion, and the particular circumstances are as happily touch'd, as they

they could have been by the most judicious orator. I know not that any poet, ancient or modern, has shewn so perfect a judgment in rhetoric as our countryman. I wish he had employed his eloquence too in arraigning the baseness and treachery of John of Lancaster's conduct, in breaking his covenant with the rebels.

Pistol is an odd kind of personage, intended I suppose to ridicule some fashionable affectation of bombast language. When such characters exist no longer any where but in the writings in which they have been ridiculed, they seem to have been monsters of the poet's brain. The originals lost and the mode forgot, one can neither praise the imitation nor laugh at the ridicule. Comic writers should therefore always exhibit some characteristic distinctions as well as temporary modes. Justice Shallow will for ever rank with a certain species of men; he is like a well painted portrait in the dress of his age. Pistol appears a mere antiquated habit, so uncouthly fashioned, we can hardly believe

believe it was made for any thing but a masquerade frolic. The poets who mean to please posterity, should therefore work as painters, not as taylor's, and give us peculiar features, rather than fantastic habits : but where there is such a prodigious variety of well-drawn portraits as in this play, we may excuse one piece of mere drapery, especially when exhibited to expose an absurd and troublesome fashion.

Mine hostess Quickly is of a species not extinct. It may be said, the author there sinks from comedy to farce, but she helps to complete the character of Falstaffe, and some of the dialogues in which she is engaged are diverting. Every scene in which Doll Tearsheet appears is indecent, and therefore not only indefensible but inexcusable. There are delicacies of decorum in one age unknown to another age, but whatever is immoral is equally blamable in all ages; and every approach to obscenity is an offence for which wit cannot atone, nor
the

the barbarity or the corruption of the times excuse.

Having considered the characters of this piece, I cannot pass over the conduct of it without taking notice of the peculiar felicity with which the fable begins to unfold itself from the very beginning.

The first scenes give the outlines of the characters, and the argument of the drama. Where is there an instance of any opening of a play equal to this? And I think I did not rashly assert, that it is one of the most difficult parts of the dramatic art; for that surely may be allowed so, in which the greatest masters have very seldom succeeded. Euripides is not very happy in this respect. Iphigenia in Tauris begins by telling to herself, in a pretty long soliloquy, who she is, and all that happened to her at Aulis. As Aristotle gives this play the highest praise, we may be assured it did not in any respect offend the Greek taste: and Boileau not injudiciously prefers this
simple

simple exposition, destitute as it is of any grace, to the perplexed and tedious declamation of the modern stage.

Que dès les premiers vers l'action préparée,
Sans point, du sujet applanisse l'entrée,
Je me ris d'un acteur, qui lent à s'exprimer,
De ce qu'il veut, d'abord ne sait pas m'informer;
Et qui, debrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
D'un divertissement me fait une fatigue.
J'aimerois mieux encor qu'il declinât son nom,
Et dît, Je suis Oreste, ou bien Agamemnon :
Que d'aller par un tas de confuses merveilles,
Sans rien dire à l'esprit etourdir les oreilles.

That the simplicity of Euripides is preferable to the perplexity or bombast of Corneille's manner in developing the story of several of his tragedies, no person of just taste I believe will dispute. The first scene of the *Cinna* has been ridiculed by Boileau. That of *Sertorius* is not very happy. His famous play of *Rodogune* is opened by two unknown persons, one of whom begins,

Enfin ce jour pompeux, cet heureux jour, nous luit;
and,

and, after un tas de confuses merveilles in the most wretched verse, extended to the length of seventy lines, when the reader very impatiently expects to be informed of the whole of the narration, stops short with these words,

Je vous achèverai le reste une autre fois.

Two brothers united by the most tender friendship, living in the same palace, having been long in love with the same princess, never have intimated their passion to each other, not out of a motive of jealousy or distrust, but that their confidants may tell it the spectator, and make him some amends for the abrupt conclusion of the former conversation. However, still the poor spectator is much in the dark, till the queen, who is a perfect Machiavel, relates, merely from love of talking, all the murders she has committed, and those she still intends to commit, to her waiting-woman, for whose parts she expresses at the same time a sovereign contempt.

Here

Here I cannot help taking notice that as the poet's want of art made it necessary to set the queen to prate of her former crimes, to let us into the fable; so ignorance of human nature betrayed him, in a succeeding scene, into the enormous absurdity of making both Rodogune and the queen without hesitation, the one advise the lover to murder his mistress, the other the son to murder his mother. Here again an instance offers itself of our Shakespear's superior knowledge of the heart of man. King John wishes to instigate Hubert to kill Prince Arthur, but observe with what difficulty he expresses his horrid purpose.

King JOHN.

Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert,
We owe thee much; within this wall of flesh
There is a soul counts thee her creditor,
And with advantage means to pay thy love:
And, my good friend, thy voluntary oath
Lives in this bosom, dearly cherished.
Give me thy hand, I had a thing to say—
But I will fit it with some better time,

By

By heaven, Hubert, I'm almost asham'd
To say what good respect I have of thee.

HUBERT.

I am much bounden to your majesty.

King JOHN.

Good friend, thou hast no cause to say so yet,—
But thou shalt have—and creep time ne'er so slow,
Yet it shall come for me to do thee good.

I had a thing to say—but, let it go :

The sun is in the heav'n, and the proud day

Attended with the pleasures of the world,

Is all too wanton, and too full of gaudes,

To give me audience. If the midnight bell

Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth

Sound one unto the drowsy race of night;

If this same were a church-yard where we stand,

And thou possessed with a thousand wrongs;

Or if that surly spirit melancholy

Had bak'd thy blood and made it heavy-thick,

Which else runs tickling up and down the veins,

Making that idiot laughter keep mens eyes,

And strain their cheeks to idle merriment;

(A passion hateful to my purposes)

Or if thou could'st see me without eyes,

Hear me without thine ears, and make reply

Without

The Second Part of HENRY IV. 129

Without a tongue, using conceit alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words;
Then, in despite of broad-ey'd watchful day,
I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts :
But ah, I will not—yet I love thee well ;
And; by my troth, I think, thou lov'st me well.

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ON

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ON THE
PRÆTERNATURAL
BEINGS.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

ON THE
PRÆTERNATURAL
BEINGS.

AS the genius of Shakespear, through the whole extent of the poet's province, is the object of our enquiry, we should do him great injustice, if we did not attend to his peculiar felicity, in those fictions and inventions, from which poetry derives its highest distinction, and from whence it first assumed its pretensions to divine inspiration, and appeared the associate of religion.

The ancient poet was admitted into the synod of the Gods : he discoursed of their natures, he repeated their counsels, and, without the charge of impiety or presumption, disclosed their dissensions, and published their vices. He peopled the woods with
I 3 nymphs,

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Nymphs, the rivers with deities; and, that he might still have some being within call to his assistance, he placed responsive echo in the vacant regions of air.

In the infant ages of the world, the credulity of ignorance greedily received every marvellous tale: but, as mankind increased in knowledge, and a long series of traditions had established a certain mythology and history, the poet was no longer permitted to range, uncontrolled, through the boundless dominions of fancy, but became restrained, in some measure, to things believed or known.—Though the duty of poetry to please and to surprise still subsisted, the means varied with the state of the world, and it soon grew necessary to make the new inventions lean on the old traditions.—The human mind delights in novelty, and is captivated by the marvellous, but even in fable itself requires the credible.—The poet, who can give to splendid inventions, and to fictions new and bold, the air and authority of reality and truth, is master of the genuine sources

sources of the Castalian spring, and may justly be said to draw his inspiration from *the well-head of pure poetry*.

Shakelpear saw how useful the popular superstitions had been to the ancient poets: he felt that they were necessary to poetry itself. One needs only to read some modern French heroic poems to be convinced. How poorly epic poetry subsists on the pure elements of history and philosophy: Tasso, though he had a subject so popular, at the time he wrote, as the deliverance of Jerusalem, was obliged to employ the operations of magic, and the interposition of angels and demons, to give the marvellous, the sublime, and, I may add, that religious air to his work, which ennobles the enthusiasm, and sanctifies the fiction of the poet. Ariosto's excursive muse wanders through the regions of romance, attended by all the superb train of chivalry, giants, dwarfs, and enchanters; and however these poets, by the severe and frigid critics may have been condemned for giving ornaments not purely

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classical, to their works ; I believe every reader of taste admires, not only the fertility of their imagination, but the judgment with which they availed themselves of the superstition of the times, and of the customs and modes of the country, in which they laid their scenes of action.

To recur, as the learned sometimes do, to the mythology and fables of other ages, and other countries, has ever a poor effect ; Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo, only embellish a modern story, as a print from their statues adorns the frontispiece.—We admire indeed the art of the sculptors who give their images with grace and majesty ; but no devotion is excited, no enthusiasm kindled, by the representations of characters whose divinity we do not acknowledge.

When the Pagan temples ceased to be revered, and the Parnassian mount existed no longer, it would have been difficult for the poet of later times to have preserved the divinity of his muse inviolate, if the western
world

world too had not had its sacred fables, While there is any national superstition which credulity has consecrated, any hallowed tradition long revered by vulgar faith; to that sanctuary, that asylum, may the poet resort.—Let him tread the holy ground with reverence; respect the established doctrine; exactly observe the accustomed rites, and the attributes of the object of veneration; then shall he not vainly invoke an inexorable or absent deity. Ghosts, fairies, goblins, elves, were as propitious, were as assistant to Shakespear, and gave as much of the sublime, and of the marvellous, to his fictions, as nymphs, satyrs, fawns, and even the triple Geryon, to the works of ancient bards. Our poet never carries his præternatural beings beyond the limits of the popular tradition. It is true, that he boldly exerts his poetic genius and fascinating powers in that magic circle, *in which none e'er durst walk but he*: but as judicious as bold, he contains himself within it. He calls up all the stately phantoms in the regions of superstition, which our faith will
receive

138 *On the Præternatural Beings.*

receive with reverence. He throws into their manners and language a mysterious solemnity, favorable to superstition in general, with something highly characteristic of each particular being which he exhibits. His witches, his ghosts, and his fairies, seem spirits of health or goblins damn'd ; *bring with them airs from heaven, or blasts from hell.* His ghosts are sullen, melancholy, and terrible. Every sentence, utter'd by the witches, is a prophecy or a charm ; their manners are malignant, their phrases ambiguous, their promises delusive. — The witches cauldron is a horrid collection of what is most horrid in their supposed incantations. Ariel is a spirit, mild, gentle, and sweet, possess'd of supernatural powers, but subject to the command of a great magician.

The fairies are sportive and gay ; the innocent artificers of harmless frauds, and mirthful delusions. Puck's enumeration of the feats of a fairy is the most agreeable recital of their supposed gambols.

To all these beings our poet has assigned tasks, and appropriated manners adapted to their imputed dispositions and characters ; which are continually developing through the whole piece, in a series of operations conducive to the catastrophe. They are not brought in as subordinate or casual agents, but lead the action, and govern the fable ; in which respect our countryman has entered more into theatrical propriety than the Greek tragedians.

Every species of poetry has its distinct duties and obligations. The drama does not, like the epic, admit of episode, superfluous persons, or things incredible ; for, as it is observed by a critic of great ingenuity and taste, * “ that which passes in representation, and challenges, as it were, the “ scrutiny of the eye, must be truth itself, or “ something very nearly approaching to it.” It should indeed be what our imagination will adopt, though our reason would reject

* Hurd, on Dramatic Imitation.

it. Great caution and dexterity are required in the dramatic poet to give an air of reality to fictitious existence.

In the bold attempt to give to airy nothing a local habitation and a person, regard must be paid to fix it in such scenes, and to display it in such actions, as are agreeable to the popular opinion. — Witches holding their sabbath, and saluting passengers on the blasted heath; ghosts, at the midnight hour, visiting the glimpses of the moon, and whispering a bloody secret, from propriety of place and action, derive a credibility very propitious to the scheme of the poet. *Reddere personæ—convenientia cuique*, cannot be less his duty in regard to these superior and divine, than to human characters. Indeed, from the invariableness of their natures, a greater consistency and uniformity is necessary; but most of all, as the belief of their intervention depends entirely on their manners and sentiments suiting with the preconceived opinion of them,

The

The magician Prospero raising a storm ;
witches performing infernal rites ; or any
other exertion of the supposed powers and
qualities of the agent, were easily credited
by the vulgar.

The genius of Shakespear informed him
that poetic fable must rise above the simple
tale of the nurse ; therefore he adorns the
beldame tradition with flowers gathered on
classic ground, but still wisely suffering those
simples of her native soil, to which the esta-
blished superstition of her country has attri-
buted a magic spell, to be predominant. Can
any thing be more poetical than Prospero's
address to his attendant spirits before he dis-
misses them ?

PROSPERO.

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune ; and do fly him
When he comes back ; ye demy-puppets, that,
By the moonshine, the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof

142 *On the Preternatural Beings.*

Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you, whose pastime
 Is to make midnight mushrooms ; that rejoice
 To hear the solemn curfew ; by whose aid
 (Weak masters tho' ye be) I have bedimm'd
 The noon-tide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
 And 'twixt the green-sea and the azur'd vault
 Set roaring war ; to the dread rattling thunder
 Have I giv'n fire, and rif't Jove's stout oak
 With his own bolt : the strong-bas'd promontory
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
 The pine and cedar : graves at my command
 Have wak'd their sleepers ; op'd, and let them forth,
 By my so potent art,

Here are agreeably summed up the popular stories concerning the power of magicians. The incantations of the witches in Macbeth are more solemn and terrible than those of the Erichtho of Lucan, or of the Canidia of Horace. It may be said, indeed, that Shakespear had an advantage derived from the more direful character of his national superstitions.

A cele-

A celebrated writer in his ingenious letters on chivalry, has observed, that the Gothic manners, and Gothic superstitions, are more adapted to the uses of poetry, than the Grecian. The devotion of those times was gloomy and fearful, not being purged of the terrors of the Celtic fables. The priest often availed himself of the dire inventions of his predecessor, the Druid. The church of Rome adopted many of the Celtic superstitions; others, which were not established by it as points of faith, still maintained a traditional authority among the vulgar. Climate, temper, modes of life, and institutions of government, seem all to have conspired to make the superstitions of the Celtic nations melancholy and terrible. Philosophy had not mitigated the austerity of ignorant devotion, or tamed the fierce spirit of enthusiasm. As the bards, who were our philosophers and poets, pretended to be possessed of the dark secrets of magic and divination, they certainly encouraged the ignorant credulity, and anxious fears, to which such impostures

tures owe their success and credit. The retired and gloomy scenes appointed for the most solemn rites of devotion; the austerity and rigour of druidical discipline and jurisdiction; the fasts, the penances, the sad excommunications from the comforts and privileges of civil life; the dreadful anathema, whose vengeance pursued the wretched beyond the grave, which bounds all human power and mortal jurisdiction, must deeply imprint on the mind all those forms of superstition such an hierarchy presented. The bard, who was subservient to the druid, had mixed them in his heroic song; in his historical annals; in his medical practice: genii assisted his heroes; dæmons decided the fate of the battle; and charms cured the sick, or the wounded. After the consecrated groves were cut down, and the temples demolished, the tales that sprung from thence were still preserved with religious reverence in the minds of the people.

The poet found himself happily situated
amidst

amidst enchantments, ghosts, goblins ; every element supposed the residence of a kind of deity ; the genius of the mountain, the spirit of the floods, the oak endued with sacred prophecy, made men walk abroad with a fearful apprehension

Of powers unseen, and mightier far than they.

On the mountains, and in the woods, stalked the angry spectre ; and in the gayest and most pleasing scenes, even within the cheerful haunts of men, amongst villages and farms,

Tripp'd the light fairies and the dapper elves.

The reader will easily perceive what resources remained for the poet in this visionary land of ideal forms. The general scenery of nature, considered as inanimate, only adorns the descriptive part of poetry ; but being, according to the Celtic traditions, animated by a kind of intelligences, the bard could better make use of them for his moral purposes. That awe of the immediate presence of the deity, which, among the rest of the vulgar, is confined to temples and altars, was here diffused over every

K

object.

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object. They passed trembling through the woods, and over the mountain, and by the lakes, inhabited by these invisible powers; such apprehensions must indeed

Deepen the murmur of the falling floods,

And shed a browner horror on the woods;

give fearful accents to every whisper of the animate or inanimate creation, and arm every shadow with terrors.

With great reason, therefore, it was asserted, that the western bards had advantage over Homer in the superstitions of their country. The religious ceremonies of Greece were more pompous than solemn; and seemed as much a part of their civil institutions, as belonging to spiritual matters: nor did they impress so deep a sense of invisible beings, and prepare the mind to catch the enthusiasm of the poet, and to receive with veneration the phantoms he presented.

Our countryman has another superiority over the Greek poets, even the earliest of them, who, having imbibed the learning of mysterious

mysterious Egypt, addicted themselves to allegory; but our Gothic bard employs the potent agency of sacred fable, instead of mere amusive allegory. When the world becomes learned and philosophical, fable refines into allegory. But the age of fable is the golden age of poetry; when the beams of unclouded reason, and the steady lamp of inquisitive philosophy, throw their penetrating rays upon the phantoms of imagination, they discover them to have been mere shadows, formed by ignorance. The thunderbolts of Jove, forged in Cimmerian caves; the cestus of Venus, woven by hands of the attracting Graces, cease to terrify and allure. Echo, from an amorous nymph, fades into voice, and nothing more; the very threads of Iris's scarf are untwisted; all the poet's spells are broken, his charms dissolved: deserted on his own enchanted ground, he takes refuge in the groves of philosophy; but there his divinities evaporate in allegory; in which mystic and insubstantial state they do but weakly assist his operations. By associating his muse

K 2

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with philosophy, he hopes she may establish with the learned the worship she won from the ignorant ; so makes her quit the old traditional fable, from whence she derived her first authority and power, to follow airy hypothesis, and chimerical systems. Allegory, the daughter of fable, is admired by the fastidious wit, and abstruse scholar, when her mother begins to be treated as superannuated, foolish, and doting ; but however well she may please and amuse, not being worshipped as divine, she does not awe and terrify like sacred mythology, nor ever can establish the same fearful devotion, nor assume such arbitrary power over the mind. Her person is not adapted to the stage, nor her qualities to the business and end of dramatic representation. L'Abbe du Bos has judiciously distinguished the reasons why allegory is not fit for the drama. What the critic investigated by art and study, the wisdom of nature unfolded to our unlettered poet, or he would not have resisted the prevalent fashion of his allegorizing age ; especially

as Spencer's *Fairy Queen* was the admired work of the times.

Allegorical beings, performing acts of chivalry, fell in with the taste of an age that affected abstruse learning, romantic valour, and high-flown gallantry. Prince Arthur, the British Hercules, was brought from ancient ballads and romances, to be allegorized into the knight of magnanimity, at the court of Gloriana. His knights followed him thither, in the same moralized garb, and even the questynge beast received no less honour and improvement from the allegorizing art of Spencer, as has been shewn by a critic of great learning, ingenuity, and taste, in his observations on the *Fairy Queen*.

Our first theatrical entertainments, after we emerged from gross barbarism, were of the allegorical kind. The Christmas carol, and carnival shews, the pious pastimes of our holy-days, were turned into pageantries

K 3

and

and masques, all symbolical and allegorical. —Our stage rose from hymns to the virgin, and encomiums on the patriarchs and saints; as the Grecian tragedies from the hymns to Bacchus. Our early poets added narration and action to this kind of psalmody, as Æschylus had done to the song of the goat. Much more rapid indeed was the progress of the Grecian stage towards perfection. —Philosophy, poetry, eloquence, all the fine arts, were in their meridian glory, when the drama first began to dawn at Athens, and gloriously it shone forth, illumined by every kind of intellectual light.

Shakespear, in the dark shades of Gothic barbarism, had no resources but in the very phantoms that walked the night of ignorance and superstition; or in touching the latent passions of civil rage and discord; sure to please best his fierce and barbarous audience, when he raised the bloody ghost, or reared the warlike standard. His choice of these subjects was judicious, if we consider the times

times in which he lived ; his management of them so masterly, that he will be admired in all times.

In the same age, Ben. Johnson, more proud of his learning than confident of his genius, was desirous to give a metaphysical air to his compositions. He composed many pieces of the allegorical kind, established on the Grecian mythology, and rendered his play-house a perfect pantheon.—Shakespeare disdained these quaint devices ; an admirable judge of human nature, with a capacity most extensive, and an invention most happy, he contented himself with giving dramatic manners to history, sublimity and its appropriated powers and charms to fiction ; and in both these arts he is unequalled.—The *Catiline* and *Sejanus* of Johnson are cold, crude, heavy pieces ; turgid where they should be great ; bombast where they should be sublime ; the sentiments extravagant ; the manners exaggerated ; and the whole undramatically conducted by long senatorial speeches, and flat plagiarisms from

K 4

Tacitus

Tacitus and Sallust. Such of this author's pieces as he boasts to be *grounded on antiquity and solid learning, and to lay bold on removed mysteries* *, have neither the majesty of Shakespear's serious fables, nor the pleasing sportfulness and poetical imagination of his fairy tales. Indeed if we compare our countryman, in this respect, with the most admired writers of antiquity, we shall, perhaps, not find him inferior to them.—Æschylus, with greater impetuosity of genius than even our countryman, makes bold incursions into the blind chaos of mingled allegory and fable, but he is not so happy in diffusing the solemn shade; in casting the dim, religious light that should reign there. When he introduces his furies, and other supernatural beings, he exposes them by too glaring a light; causes affright in the spectator, but never rises to imparting that unlimited terror which we feel when Macbeth to his bold address,

* Prologue to the Masque of Queens.

How

How now ! ye secret, foul, and midnight hags,
What is't ye do?
is answered,

A deed without a name.

The witches of the forest are as important in the tragedy of Macbeth, as the Eumenides in the drama of Æschylus ; but our poet is infinitely more dexterous and judicious in the conduct of their part. The secret, foul, and midnight hags are not introduced into the castle of Macbeth ; they never appear but in their allotted region of solitude and night, nor act beyond their sphere of ambiguous prophecy, and malignant forcery. The Eumenides, snoring in the temple of Apollo, and then appearing as evidences against Orestes in the Areopagus, seem both acting out of their sphere, and below their character. It was the appointed office of the venerable goddesses, to avenge the crimes unwhipt of justice, not to demand the public trial of guilty men. They must lose much of the fear and reverence in which they were held
for

for their secret influence on the mind, and the terrors they could inflict on criminal conscience, when they were represented as obliged to have recourse to the ordinary method of revenge, by being witnesses and pleaders in a court of justice, to obtain the corporal punishment of the offender. Indeed, it is possible, that the whole story of this play might be allegorical, as thus, that Orestes, haunted by the terrors which pursue the guilty mind, confessed his crime to the Areopagus, with all the aggravating circumstances remorse suggested to him, from a pious desire to expiate his offence, by submitting to whatever sentence this respectable assembly should pronounce for that purpose. The oracle, which commanded him to put Clytemnestra to death, would plead for him with his judges: their voices being equal for absolving or punishing, wisdom gives her vote for absolving him.

Thus considered, what appears so odd in the mouth of the goddess, that she is little affected

affected by the circumstance of Clytemnestra's relation to the murderer, because she herself had no mother, means only, that justice is not governed by any affection or personal consideration, but acts by an invariable and general rule. If the oracle commanded, and the laws justified the act of Orestes, by appointing the next in blood to avenge the murder, then other circumstances of a special and inferior kind, were not to have any weight. I am inclined to think this tragedy is a mixture of history and allegory. Æschylus affected the allegorical manner so much as to form a tragedy, called the Balance, upon the allegory in Homer, of Jupiter's weighing the fates of Hector and Achilles *; and it is apparent, that the Prometheus of this author, is the ancient allegory of Prometheus wrought into a drama. Prometheus makes his first appearance with two symbolical persons, Violence and Force, which are, apparently, of the poet's fiction. Pere Brumoy intimates a

* Apud Plut. de modo leg. poetar.

suspicion that this tragedy is an allegory, but imagines it alludes to Xerxes or Darius, because it abounds with reflections on tyranny. To flatter the republican spirit, all the Grecian tragedies are full of such reflections. But an oblique censure on the Persian monarch could not have excused the direct imputations thrown on the character of Jupiter; if the circumstances of the story had been taken in a literal sense; nor can it be supposed that the Athenians would have endured the most violent affronts to have been offered to the character of that deity to whom they every day offered sacrifice. An allegory being sometimes a mere physical hypothesis, without impiety might be treated with freedom.—It is probable that many allegories brought from the hieroglyphic land of Ægypt, were, in the grosser times of Greece, literally understood by the vulgar; but, in more philosophic ages, were again transmuted into allegory; which will account for the mythology of the Greeks and Ægyptians varying greatly, but

but still preserving such a resemblance as shews them to be derived from the same origin.

Jealous of the neighbouring states, and ever attentive to the glory and interest of their commonwealth, an Athenian audience listened with pleasure to any circumstances, in their theatrical entertainments, which reflected honour on their country. The institution of the Areopagus by the express commands of Minerva; a perpetual amity promised by Orestes between Argos and Athens in the tragedy of the Eumenides; and a prophecy of Prometheus, which threw a lustre on the author of the race of the Heraclidæ, were circumstances, without question, sedulously sought by the poet, and favorably received by the spectator. But though such subjects might be chosen, or invented, as would introduce some favorable incidents, or flattering reflections, this intention did not always reign through the whole drama.

It

It has been just now observed, that Shakespear has an advantage over the Greek poets, in the more solemn, gloomy, and mysterious air of his national superstitions; but this avails him only with critics of deep penetration and true taste, and with whom sentiment has more sway than authority. The learned have received the popular tales of Greece from their poets; ours are derived to them from the illiterate vulgar. The phantom of Darius, in the tragedy of the Persians, evoked by ancient rites, is beheld with reverence by the scholar, and endured by the bel esprit. To these the ghost of Hamlet is an object of contempt or ridicule. Let us candidly examine these royal shades, as exhibited to us by those great masters in the art of exciting pity and terror, Æschylus and Shakespear; and impartially decide which poet throws most of the sublime into the præternatural character; and, also, which has the art to render it most efficient in the drama. This enquiry may be more interesting, as the French wits have often
mentioned

mentioned Hamlet's ghost as an instance of the barbarism of our theatre. The Persians, of Æschylus, is certainly one of the most august spectacles that ever was represented on a theatre ; nobly imagined, happily sustained, regularly conducted, deeply interesting to the Athenian people, and favorable to their great scheme of resisting the power of the Persian monarch. It would be absurd to depreciate this excellent piece, or to bring into a general comparison with it, a drama of so different a kind as the tragedy of Hamlet. But it is surely allowable to compare the Persian phantom with the Danish ghost ; and to examine, whether any thing but prejudice, in favour of the ancients, protects the superstitious circumstances relative to the one, from the ridicule with which those accompanying the other are treated. Atossa, the widow of Darius, relates to the sages of the Persian council, a dream and an omen ; they advise her to consult the shade of her dead lord, upon what is to be done in the unfortunate situation of Xerxes just defeated by the Greeks. In the third act she

enters offering to the Manes a libation composed of milk, honey, wine, oil, &c. upon this Darius issues from his tomb. Let the wits, who are so smart on our ghost's disappearing at the cock's crowing, explain why, in reason, a ghost in Persia, or in Greece, should be more fond of milk and honey, than averse, in Denmark, to the crowing of a cock. Each poet adopted, in his work, the superstition relative to his subject; and the poet who does so, understands his business much better than the critic, who, in judging of that work, refuses it his attention. The phantom of Darius comes forth in his regal robes to Atossa and the Satraps in council, who, in the Eastern manner, pay their silent adorations to their emperor. His quality of ghost does not appear to make any impression upon them; and the Satraps so exactly preserve the characters of courtiers, that they do not venture to tell him the true state of the affairs of his kingdom, and its recent disgraces: finding he cannot get any information from them, he addresses himself to Atossa, who does not break forth
with

with that passion and tenderness one should suppose she would do on the sight of her long lost husband ; but very calmly informs him, after some flattery on the constant prosperity of his reign, of the calamitous state of Persia under Xerxes, who has been stimulated by his courtiers to make war upon Greece. The phantom, who was to appear ignorant of what was past, that the Athenian ear might be soothed and flattered with the detail of their victory at Salamis, is allowed, for the same reason, such prescience as to foretell their future triumph at Platea. Whatever else he adds by way of council or reproof, either in itself, or in the mode of delivering it, is nothing more than might be expected from any old counsellor of state. Darius gives his advice to the old men, to enjoy whatever they can, because riches are of no use in the grave. As this touches the most absurd and ridiculous foible in human nature, the increase of a greedy and solicitous desire of wealth as the period of enjoyment of it becomes more precarious and short, the admonition has something of

L

a comic

a comic and satirical turn, unbecoming the solemn character of the speaker, and the sad exigency upon which he was called. The intervention of this præternatural being gives nothing of the marvellous or the sublime to the piece, nor adds to, or is connected with its interest. The supernatural divested of *the awful and the terrible* make but a poor figure in any species of poetry ; useless and unconnected with the fable, it wants propriety in dramatic poetry. Shakespear had so just a taste that he never introduced any præternatural character on the stage that did not assist in the conduct of the drama. Indeed he had such a prodigious force of talents he could make every being his fancy created subservient to his designs. The uncouth, ungainly monster, Caliban, is so subject to his genius, as to assist in bringing things to the proposed end and perfection. And the slight fairies, *weak masters though they be*, even in their wanton gambols, and idle sports, perform great tasks by *his so potent art*.

But

BUT to return to the intended comparison between the Grecian shade and the Danish ghost. The first propriety in the conduct of this kind of machinery, seems to be, that the præternatural person be intimately connected with the fable; that he increase the interest, add to the solemnity of it, and that his efficiency, in bringing on the catastrophe, be in some measure adequate to the violence done to the ordinary course of things in his visible interposition. These are points peculiarly important in dramatic poetry, as has been before observed. To these ends it is necessary this being should be acknowledged and revered by the national superstition, and every operation that develops the attributes, which the vulgar opinion, or nurse's legend, taught us to ascribe to him, will augment our pleasure; whether we give the reins to imagination, and, as spectators, willingly yield ourselves up to pleasing delusion, or, as critics, examine the merit of the composition. I hope it is not difficult to shew, that in all these capital

points our author has excelled. At the solemn midnight hour, Horatio and Marcellus, the schoolfellows of young Hamlet, come to the centinels upon guard, excited by a report that the ghost of their late monarch had some preceding nights appeared to them. Horatio, not being of the credulous vulgar, gives little credit to the story, but bids Bernardo proceed in his relation.

BERNARDO.

Last night of all,

When yon same star, that's westward from the pole,

Had made his course t'illumine that part of heav'n,

Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,

The bell then beating one —

Here enters the ghost, after you are thus prepared. There is something solemn and sublime in thus regulating the walking of the spirit, by the course of the star : It intimates a connection and correspondence between things beyond our ken, *and above the visible diurnal sphere*. Horatio is affected with that kind of fear which such an appearance would naturally excite. He trembles,

and

and turns pale. When the violence of the emotion subsides, he reflects, that probably this supernatural event portends some danger lurking in the state. This suggestion gives importance to the phenomenon, and engages our attention. Horatio's relation of the king's combat with the Norwegian, and of the forces the young Fortinbras is assembling in order to attack Denmark, seems to point out from what quarter the apprehended peril is to arise. Such appearances, says he, preceded the fall of mighty Julius, and the ruin of the great commonwealth ; and he adds, such have often been the omens of disasters in our own state. There is great art in this conduct. The true cause of the royal Dane's discontent could not be guessed at : it was a secret which could be only revealed by himself. In the mean time, it was necessary to captivate our attention, by demonstrating, that the poet was not going to exhibit such idle and frivolous gambols as ghosts are by the vulgar often represented to perform. The historical

L 3

testimony,

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testimony, that, antecedent to the death of
Cæsar,

The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead

Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets,

gives credibility and importance to this
phenomenon. Horatio's address to the
ghost is brief and pertinent, and the whole
purport of it agreeable to the vulgar concep-
tions of these matters.

HORATIO.

Stay, illusion!

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,

Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done,

That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,

Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,

Which happily foreknowing may avoid,

Oh speak !

Or, if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,

For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

Speak of it.

Its

Its vanishing at the crowing of the cock is another circumstance of the established superstition.

Young Hamlet's indignation at his mother's hasty and incestuous marriage, his sorrow for his father's death, his character of that prince, prepare the spectator to sympathize with his wrongs and sufferings. The son, as is natural, with much more vehement emotion than Horatio did, addresses his father's shade. Hamlet's terror, his astonishment, his vehement desire to know the cause of this visitation, are irresistibly communicated to the spectator by the following speech.

HAMLET.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heav'n, or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape,
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane: oh! answer me;
Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell,

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Why

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Why thy canonized bones, hearf'd in death,
 Have burst their cearments? Why the fepulchre,
 Wherein we faw thee quietly in-urn'd,
 Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws,
 To caft thee up again? What may this mean,
 That thou, dead corfe, again, in compleat fteel,
 Revifit'ft thus the glimpfes of the moon,
 Making night hideous?

Never did the Grecian mufe of tragedy relate
 a tale fo full of pity and terror as is imparted
 by the ghofl. Every circumftance melts us
 with compaffion; and with what horror do
 we hear him fay!

• GHOST.

But that I am forbid

To tell the fecrets of my prifon-houfe,
 I could a tale unfold; whole lighteft word
 Would harrow up thy foul, freeze thy young blood,
 Make thy two eyes, like ftars, ftart from their fpheres,
 Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
 And each particular hair to ftand on end.
 Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:
 But this eternal blazon muft not be
 To ears of flefh and blood.

All

All that follows is solemn, sad, and deeply affecting.

Whatever in Hamlet belongs to the præternatural is perfectly fine ; the rest of the play does not come within the subject of this chapter.

The ingenious criticism on the play of the Tempest, published in the Adventurer, has made it unnecessary to enlarge on that admirable piece, which alone would prove our author to have had a fertile, a sublime, and original genius.

T H E

THE
T R A G E D Y
OF
M A C B E T H.

THE
HISTORY OF
THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK

FROM THE
FUNDAMENTALS OF
THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK

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THE
T R A G E D Y
OF
M A C B E T H.

THIS piece is perhaps one of the greatest exertions of the tragic and poetic powers, that any age, or any country has produced. Here are opened new sources of terror, new creations of fancy. The agency of witches and spirits excites a species of terror, that cannot be effected by the operation of human agency, or by any form or disposition of human things. For the known limits of their powers and capacities set certain bounds to our apprehensions ; mysterious horrors, undefined terrors, are raised by the intervention of beings whose
nature

nature we do not understand, whose actions we cannot control, and whose influence we know not how to escape. Here we feel through all the faculties of the soul, and to the utmost extent of her capacity. The apprehension of the interposition of such agents is the most salutary of all fears. It keeps up in our minds a sense of our connection with awful and invisible spirits, to whom our most secret actions are apparent, and from whose chastisement innocence alone can defend us. From many dangers power will protect; many crimes may be concealed by art and hypocrisy; but when supernatural beings arise, to reveal, and to avenge, guilt blanches through her mask, and trembles behind her bulwarks.

Shakespeare has been sufficiently justified, by the best critics, for availing himself of the popular faith in witchcraft; and he is certainly as defensible in this point, as Euripides, and other Greek tragedians, for introducing Jupiter, Diana, Minerva, &c. whose personal intervention, in the events exhibited

bited on their stage, had not obtained more credit, with the thinking and philosophical part of their spectators, than tales of witchcraft had done among the wise and learned here. Much later than the age in which Macbeth lived, even in Shakespear's own time, there were severe statutes extant against witchcraft.

Some objections have been made to the Hecate of the Greeks being joined to the witches of our country.

Milton, a more correct writer, has often mixed the Pagan deities even with the most sacred characters of our religion. Our witches power was supposed to be exerted only in little and low mischief: this therefore being the only instance where their interposition is recorded in the revolutions of a kingdom, the poet thought, perhaps, that the story would pass off better, with the learned at least, if he added the celebrated Hecate to the weird sisters; and she is introduced, chiding their presumption, for trading in prophecies and affairs of death.

The dexterity is admirable with which the predictions of the witches (as Macbeth observes) prove true to the ear, but false to the hope, according to the general condition of vain oracles. With great judgment the poet has given to Macbeth the very temper to be wrought upon by such suggestions. The bad man is his own tempter. Richard III. had a heart that prompted him to do all that the worst demon could have suggested, so that the witches had been only an idle wonder in his story ; nor did he want such a counsellor as Lady Macbeth ; a ready instrument like Buckingham, to adopt his projects, and execute his orders, was sufficient. But Macbeth, of a generous disposition, and good propensities, but with vehement passions and aspiring wishes, was a subject liable to be seduced by splendid prospects, and ambitious counsels. This appears from the following character given of him by his wife :

Yet do I fear thy nature ;

It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great ;

Art not without ambition ; but without

The

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The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst
highly,

That wouldst thou holily ; wouldst not play false,

And yet wouldst wrongly win.

So much inherent ambition in a character, without other vice, and full of the milk of human kindness, though obnoxious to temptation, yet would have great struggles before it yielded, and as violent fits of subsequent remorse.

If the mind is to be medicated by the operations of pity and terror, surely no means are so well adapted to that end, as a strong and lively representation of the agonizing struggles that precede, and the terrible horrors that follow wicked actions. Other poets thought they had sufficiently attended to the moral purpose of the drama in making the furies pursue the perpetrated crime. Our author waves their bloody daggers in the road to guilt, and demonstrates, that as soon as a man begins to hearken to ill suggestions, terrors environ,

M

and

and fears distract him. Tenderness and conjugal love combat in the breasts of a Medea and a Herod in their purposed vengeance. Personal affection often weeps on the theatre, while jealousy or revenge whet the bloody knife; but Macbeth's emotions are the struggles of conscience; his agonies are the agonies of remorse. They are lessons of justice, and warnings to innocence. I do not know that any dramatic writer, except Shakespear, has set forth the pangs of guilt separate from the fear of punishment. Clytemnestra is represented by Euripides as under great terrors, on account of the murder of Agamemnon; but they arise from fear, not repentance. It is not the memory of the assassinated husband which haunts and terrifies her, but an apprehension of vengeance from his surviving son: when she is told Orestes is dead, her mind is again at ease. It must be allowed, that on the Greeian stage, it is the office of the chorus to moralize, and to point out, on every occasion, the advantages of

of virtue over vice. But how much less affecting are their animadversions than the testimony of the person concerned! Whatever belongs to the part of the chorus has hardly the force of dramatic imitation. The chorus is in a manner without personal character, or interest, and no way an agent in the drama. We cannot sympathize with the cool reflections of these idle spectators, as we do with the sentiments of the persons in whose circumstances and situation we are interested.

The heart of man, like iron and other metal, is hard, and of firm resistance, when cold, but, warmed, it becomes malleable and ductile. It is by touching the passions, and exciting sympathetic emotions, not by sentences, that the tragedian must make his impressions on the spectator. I will appeal to any person of taste, whether the following speeches of Wolsley, in another play of Shakspear, the first a soliloquy, the second addressed to his servant Cromwell,

M 2

in

in which he gives the testimony of his experience, and the result of his own feelings, would make the same impression, if uttered by a set of speculative sages in the episode of a chorus.

WOLSEY.

So farewell to the little good you bear me !
 Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness !
 This is the state of man ; to-day he puts forth
 The tender leaves of hopes, to-morrow blossoms,
 And bears his blushing honours thick upon him,
 The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
 And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
 His greatness is a ripening, nips his root ;
 And then he falls, as I do. - I have ventur'd,
 Like little wanton boys, that swim on bladders,
 These many summers in a sea of glory,
 But far beyond my depth ; my high-blown pride
 At length broke under me, and now has left me,
 Weary and old with service, to the mercy
 Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
 Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye ;
 I feel my heart new open'd. Oh, how wretched
 Is that poor man, that hangs on princes' favours !
 There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
 That sweet aspect of princes, and our ruin,

More

More pangs and fears than war or women have :

And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,

Never to hope again.

And in another place,

Let's dry our eyes, and thus far hear me, Cromwell ;

And when I am forgotten, as I shall be,

And sleep in dull cold marble, where no mention

Of me must more be heard, say then, I taught thee,

Say, Wolsey, that once trod the ways of glory,

And founded all the depths and shoals of honour,

Found thee a way, out of his wreck, to rise in ;

A sure and safe one, though thy master miss'd it.

Mark but my fall, and that which ruin'd me ;

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition,

By that sin fell the angels ; how can man then,

The image of his maker, hope to win by't ?

Love thyself last ; cherish those hearts that hate
thee ;

Corruption wins not more than honesty.

Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,

To silence envious tongues, be just, and fear not.

Let all the ends, thou aim'st at, be thy country's,

Thy god's, and truth's ; then if thou fall'st, O Crom-
well,

Thou fall'st a blessed martyr. Serve the king ;

M 3

And

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And—~~Pythee~~, lead me in;
 There take an inventory of all I have,
 To the last penny, 'tis the king's. My robe,
 And my integrity to heav'n, is all
 I dare now call mine own. O Cromwell, Cromwell,
 Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal
 I serv'd my King, he would not in mine age
 Have left me naked to mine enemies.

I selected these two passages as containing reflections of such a general kind, as might be with least impropriety transferred to the chorus; but if even these would lose much of their force and pathos if not spoken by the fallen statesman, how much more would those do, which are the expressions of some instantaneous emotion, occasioned by the peculiar situation of the person by whom they are uttered! The self-condemnation of a murderer makes a very deep impression upon us when we are told by Macbeth himself, that hearing, while he was killing Duncan, one of the grooms cry God bless us, and Amen the other, he durst not say Amen. Had a formal chorus observed that a man in
 such

such a guilty moment durst not implore that, mercy of which he stood most in need, it would have had but a slight effect. All know the detestation with which virtuous men behold a bad action. A much more salutary admonition is given when we are shewn the terrors that are combined with guilt in the breast of the offender.

Our author has so tempered the constitutional character of Macbeth, by infusing into it the milk of human kindness, and a strong tincture of honour, as to make the most violent perturbation, and pungent remorse, naturally attend on those steps to which he is led by the force of temptation. Here we must commend the poet's judgment, and his invariable attention to consistency of character; but more amazing is the art with which he exhibits the movement of the human mind, and renders audible the silent march of thought: traces its modes of operation in the course of deliberating, the pauses of hesitation, and the final act of decision; shews how reason

M 4 checks,

checks, and how the passions impel; and displays to us the trepidations that precede, and the horrors that pursue acts of blood. No species of dialogue but that which a man holds with himself could effect this. The soliloquy has been permitted to all dramatic writers; but its true use has been understood only by our author, who alone has attained to a just imitation of nature in this kind of self-conference.

It is certain men do not tell themselves who they are, and whence they came; they neither narrate nor declaim in the solitude of the closet, as Greek and French writers represent. Here then is added to the drama an imitation of the most difficult and delicate kind, that of representing the internal process of the mind in reasoning and reflecting; and it is not only a difficult, but a very useful art, as it best assists the poet to expose the anguish of remorse, to repeat every whisper of the internal monitor, conscience, and, upon occasion, to lend her a voice *to amaze the guilty and appal the free.* As a man is
averse

averse to expose his crimes, and discover the turpitude of his actions, even to the faithful friend, and trusty confidant, it is more natural for him to breathe in soliloquy the dark and heavy secrets of the soul, than to utter them to the most intimate associate. The conflicts in the bosom of Macbeth, before he committed the murder, could not, by any other means, have been so well exposed. He entertains the prophecy of his future greatness with complacency, but the very idea of the means by which he is to attain it shocks him to the highest degree.

This supernatural solliciting

Cannot be ill ; cannot be good. If ill,

Why hath it giv'n me the earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth ? I'm Thane of Cawdor.

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs

Against the use of nature ?

There is an obscurity and stiffness in part of these soliloquies, which I wish I could charge entirely to the confusion of Macbeth's mind

mind from the horror he feels at the thought of the murder; but our author is too much addicted to the obscure bombast, much affected by all sorts of writers in that age. The abhorrence Macbeth feels at the suggestion of assassinating his king brings him back to this determination,

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,

Without my stir.

After a pause, in which we may suppose the ambitious desire of a crown to return, so far as to make him undetermined what he shall do, and leave the decision to future time and unborn events, he concludes,

Come what come may.

Time and the hour runs thro' the roughest day.

By which I confess I do not with his two last commentators imagine is meant either the tautology of time and the hour, or an allusion to time painted with an hour-glass, or an exhortation to time to hasten forward, but rather to say *tempus & hora*, time and occasion, will carry the thing through, and bring it to some determined point and end, let

let its nature be what it will. In the next soliloquy he agitates this great question concerning the proposed murder. One argument against it, is, that such deeds must be supported by others of like nature.

But, in these cases,

We still have judgment here ; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor ; this even-handed justice
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.

He proceeds next to consider the peculiar relations in which he stands to Duncan.

He's here in double trust :

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed ; then, as his host,
Who should against his mard'rer shut the door ;
Not bear the knife myself.

Then follow his arguments against the deed from the admirable qualities of the king.

Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meekly, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead, like angels, trumpet-tongu'd again
The deep damnation of his taking off.

So,

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So, says he, with many reasons to dissuade, I have none to urge me to this act, but a vaulting ambition; which, by a daring leap, often procures itself a fall. And thus having determined, he tells Lady Macbeth;

We will proceed no further in this business.

He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought

Golden opinions from all sorts of people,

Which would be worn, now in their newest gloss,

Not cast aside so soon.

Macbeth, in debating with himself, chiefly dwells upon the guilt, and touches something on the danger of assassinating the king. When he argues with Lady Macbeth, knowing her too wicked to be affected by the one, and too daring to be deterred by the other, he urges with great propriety what he thinks may have more weight with one of her disposition; the favour he is in with the king, and the esteem he has lately acquired of the people. In answer to her charge of cowardice he finely distinguishes between manly courage and brutal ferocity.

MACBETH.

MACBETH.

I dare do all that may become a man ;

Who dares do more is none.

At length, overcome, rather than persuaded,
he determines on the bloody deed.

I am settled, and bend up

Each corp'ral agent to this terrible feat.

How terrible to him, how repugnant to his nature, we plainly perceive, when, even in the moment that he summons up the resolution needful to perform it, horrid phantasms present themselves ; murder alarumed by his centinel ; the wolf stealing towards his design ; witchcraft celebrating pale Hecate's offerings ; the midnight ravisher invading sleeping innocence, seem his associates ; and bloody daggers lead him to the very chamber of the king. At his return from thence his sense of the crime he has committed appears suitable to the repugnance he had to undertake it. He tells Lady Macbeth, that, of the grooms who slept in Duncan's chamber,

MACBETH.

There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cry'd, Murder !

They

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They wak'd each other; and I stood and heard them;
But they did say their prayers, and address them
Again to sleep.

LADY.

There are two lodg'd together.

MACBETH.

One cry'd; God bless us! and, Amen! the other;
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands:
Listening their fear, I could not say, Amen;
When they did say, God bless us!

LADY.

Consider it not so deeply.

MACBETH.

But wherefore could not I pronounce, Amen?
I had most need of blessing, and Amen
Stuck in my throat.

MACBETH.

Methought, I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder sleep; the innocent sleep.
Then he replies, when his lady bids him carry
back the daggers;

MACBETH.

I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

How natural is the exclamation of a person, who, from the fearless state of unsuspecting innocence is fallen into the suspicious condition of guilt, when upon hearing a knocking at the gate he cries out ;

MACBETH.

How is it with me, when every noise appals me ?

The poet has contrived to throw a tincture of remorse even into Macbeth's resolution to murder Banquo.—He does not proceed in it like a man, who, impenitent in crimes, and wanton in success, gaily goes forward in his violent career ; but seems impelled on, and stimulated to this additional villany, by an apprehension, that, if Banquo's posterity should inherit the crown, he has sacrificed his virtue, and defiled his own soul in vain.

MACBETH.

If 'tis so,

For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind,

For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd ;

Put rancours in the vessel of my peace

Only for them ; and mine eternal jewel

Giv'n

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Giv'n to the common enemy of man,
 To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.
 His desire to keep Lady Macbeth innocent
 of this intended murder, and yet from the
 fulness of a throbbing heart, uttering what
 may render suspected the very thing he
 wishes to conceal, shews how deeply the
 author enters into human nature, in general,
 and in every circumstance preserves the con-
 sistency of the character he exhibits.

How strongly is expressed the great truth,
 that to a man of courage, the most terrible
 object is the person he has injured, in the
 following address to Banquo's ghost :

MACBETH.

What man dare, I dare.
 Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
 The arm'd rhinoceros, or Hyrcan tyger,
 Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
 Shall never tremble ; or, be alive again,
 And dare me to the desert with thy sword ;
 If trembling I evade it, then protest me
 The baby of a girl. Hence, terrible shadow !
 Unreal mock'ry, hence !

It

The Tragedy of MACBETH. 193

It is impossible not to sympathize with the terrors Macbeth expresses in his disordered speech.

MACBETH.

It will have blood.—They say, blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs, that underfand relations, have,
By magpies, and by choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.

The perturbation with which Macbeth again resorts to the witches, and the tone of resentment and abhorrence with which he addresses them, rather expresses his sense of the crimes to which their promises excited him, than any satisfaction in the regal condition those crimes had procured.

MACBETH.

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
What is't you do?

The unhappy and disconsolate state of the most triumphant villany, from a consciousness of the internal detestation of mankind to that flagitious greatness to which

N

they

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they are forced to pay external homage, is finely expressed in the following words :

MACBETH.

I have liv'd long enough : my way of life
 Is fall'n into the fear, the yellow leaf :
 And that which should accompany old age,
 As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
 I must not look to have ; but in their stead,
 Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
 Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
 Towards the conclusion of the piece his
 mind seems to sink under its load of guilt !
 Despair and melancholy hang on his words !
 We see he has griefs that press harder on
 him than his enemies, by his address to the
 physician :

MACBETH.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd ;
 Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
 Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;
 And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
 Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
 Which weighs upon the heart ?
 The alacrity with which he attacks young
 Siward, and his reluctance to engage with
 Macduff,

Macduff, of whose blood he says he has already had too much, compleat a character which is uniformly preserved from the opening of the fable, to its conclusion. We find him ever answering to the first idea we were made to conceive of him.

The man of honour pierced through the traitor and the assassin. His mind loses its tranquillity by guilt, but never its fortitude in danger. His crimes, presented to him, even in the moral maskery of a vision, or the harmless form of sleeping innocence, terrify him more than all his foes in arms. It has been very justly observed by a late commentator, that this piece does not abound with those nice discriminations of character, usual in the plays of our author, the events being too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions. It appears to me, that the character of Macbeth was also represented less particular and sensal, that his example might be of more universal utility. He has therefore placed him on that line on which the major

part of mankind may be ranked, just between the extreams of good and bad ; a station assailable by various temptations, and which stands in need of the guard of cautionary admonition. The supernatural agents, in some measure, take off our attention from the other characters, especially as they are, throughout the piece, what they have a right to be, predominant in the events. They should not interfere but to weave the fatal web, or to unravel it ; they ought ever to be the regents of the fable and artificers of the catastrophe, as the witches are in this piece. To preserve in Macbeth a just consistency of character ; to represent that character naturally susceptible of those desires that were to be communicated to it ; to render it interesting to the spectator by some amiable qualities ; to make it exemplify the dangers of ambition, and the terrors of remorse ; was all that could be required of the tragedian and the moralist. With all the powers of poetry he elevates a legendary tale, without carrying it beyond the limits of vulgar faith and tradition. The solemn character
of

of the infernal rites would be very striking, if the scene was not made ludicrous by a mob of old women, which the players have added to the three weird sisters.—The incantation is so consonant to the doctrine of enchantments, and receives such power by the help of those potent ministers of direful superstition, the terrible and the mysterious, that it has not the air of poetical fiction so much as of a discovery of magical secrets; and thus it seizes the heart of the ignorant, and communicates an irresistible horror to the imagination of even the more informed spectator.

Shakespear was too well read in human nature, not to know, that, though reason may expel the superstitions of the nursery, the imagination does not so entirely free itself from their dominion, as not to re-admit them, if occasion presents them, in the very shape in which they were once revered. The first scene in which the witches appear, is not so happily executed as the others. He has too exactly followed the vulgar

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reports of the Lapland witches, of whom our sailors used to imagine they could purchase a fair wind.

The choice of a story, that at once corroborated King James's doctrine of demonology, and shewed the long destination of his family to the throne of Great Britain, was not less polite flattery to his majesty, than Virgil uses to Augustus and the Roman people, in making Anchises shew to Æneas the representations of unborn heroes, that were to adorn his line, and augment the glory of their common-wealth. It is reported, that a great French wit often laughs at the tragedy of Macbeth for having a legion of ghosts in it. One should imagine he either had not learnt English, or had forgot his Latin; for the spirits of Banquo's line are no more ghosts than the representations of the Julian race in the Æneid; and there is no ghost but Banquo's in the whole play. Euripides, in the most philosophic and polite age of the Athenians, brings the shade of Polydorus, Priam's

Priam's son, upon the stage, to tell a very long and lamentable tale. Here is therefore produced, by each tragedian, the departed spirit walking this upper world for causes admitted by popular faith. Among the ancients, the unburied, and with us the murdered, were supposed to do so. The apparitions are therefore equally justifiable or blamable; so the laurel crown must be adjudged to the poet who throws most of the sublime and the marvellous into the supernatural agent; best preserves the credibility of its intervention, and renders it most useful in the drama. There surely can be no dispute of the superiority of our countryman in these articles. There are many bombast speeches in the tragedy of Macbeth; and these are the lawful prize of the critic; but envy, not content to nibble at faults, strikes at its true object, the prime excellencies and perfections of the thing it would depreciate. One should not wonder if a school-boy critic, who neither knows what were the superstitions of former times, or the poet's privileges in all times, should flourish away,

with all the rash dexterity of wit, upon the appearance of a ghost; but it is strange a man of universal learning, a real and just connoisseur, and a true genius, should cite, as improper and absurd, what has been practised by the most celebrated artists in the dramatic way, when such machinery was authorised by the belief of the people. Is there not reason to suspect from such uncandid treatment of our poet by this critic, that he

Views him with jealous, yet with scornful eyes,

And hates for arts that caus'd himself to rise?

The difference between a mind naturally prone to evil, and a frail one warped by force of temptations, is delicately distinguished in Macbeth and his wife. There are also some touches of the pencil that mark the male and female character. When they deliberate on the murder of the king, the duties of host and subject strongly plead with him against the deed. She passes over these considerations; goes to Duncan's chamber resolved to kill him, but could not do

do it, because, she says, he resembled her father while he slept. There is something feminine in this, and perfectly agreeable to the nature of the sex; who, even when void of principle, are seldom entirely divested of sentiment; and thus the poet, who, to use his own phrase, had overstepped the modesty of nature in the exaggerated fierceness of her character, returns back to the line and limits of humanity, and that very judiciously, by a sudden impression, which has only an instantaneous effect. Thus she may relapse into her former wickedness, and, from the same susceptibility, by the force of other impressions, be afterwards driven to distraction. As her character was not composed of those gentle elements out of which regular repentance could be formed, it was well judged to throw her mind into the chaos of madness; and, as she had exhibited wickedness in its highest degree of ferocity and atrociousness, she should be an example of the wildest agonies of remorse. As Shakespear could most exactly delineate the human mind

mind in its regular state of reason, so no one ever so happily caught its varying forms in the wanderings of delirium.

The scene in which Macduff is informed of the murder of his wife and children, is so celebrated, that it is not necessary to enlarge upon its merit. We feel there, how much a just imitation of natural sentiments on such a tender occasion, is more pathetic than chosen terms and studied phrases. As in the foregoing chapter I have made some observations on our author's management of the Præternatural Beings, I forbear to enlarge further on the subject of the witches: that he has kept closely to the traditions concerning them, is very fully set forth in the notes of a learned commentator on his works.

This piece may certainly be deemed one of the best of Shakespear's compositions, and, though it contains some faulty speeches, and one whole scene entirely absurd and improper,

proper, which art might have corrected or lopped away ; yet genius, powerful genius only, (wild nature's vigour working at the root !) could have produced such strong and original beauties, and adapted both to the general temper and taste of the age in which it appeared,

U P O N

UPON THE
C I N N A
OF
C O R N E I L L E.

UPON THE

C I N N A

O F

C O R N E I L L E.

THOUGH it is an agreeable task, upon the whole, to attempt the vindication of injured fame, the pleasure is much allayed by its being combined with a necessity to lay open the unfairness and errors in the proceedings of which we complain. To defend is pleasant, to accuse is painful; but we must prove the injustice of the sentence, before we can demand to have it repealed.

The editor of the late edition of Corneille's works, has given the following preface to the tragedy of Cinna: "Having often heard
" Corneille and Shakespear compared, I
" thought it proper to shew their different

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“ manner in subjects that have a resemblance.
“ blance. I have therefore chosen the first
“ acts of the Death of Cæsar, where there
“ is a conspiracy, as in Cinna, and in which
“ every thing is relative to the conspiracy
“ to the end of the third act. The reader
“ may compare the thoughts, the style,
“ and the judgment of Shakespear, with
“ the thoughts, the style, and the judgment
“ of Corneille. It belongs to the
“ readers of all nations to pronounce between
“ the one and the other. A Frenchman
“ or an Englishman might perhaps be
“ suspected of some partiality. To institute
“ this process, it was necessary to make an
“ exact translation ; what was prose in the
“ tragedy of Shakespear is rendered into
“ prose ; what was in blank verse into
“ blank verse, and almost verse by verse ;
“ what is low and familiar is translated
“ familiarly and low. The translator has
“ endeavoured to rise with the author when
“ he rises ; and when he is turgid and bombast,
“ not to be more or less so than he.
“ The translation given here is the most
“ faithful

“ faithful that can be, and the only faithful
“ one in our language of any author ancient
“ or modern. I have but a word to add,
“ which is, that blank verse costs nothing
“ but the trouble of dictating ; it is not
“ more difficult to write than a letter. If
“ people should take it into their heads to
“ write tragedies in blank verse, and to act
“ them on our theatre, tragedy is ruined ;
“ take away the difficulty and you take away
“ the merit.”

An English reader will hardly forbear smiling at this bold assertion concerning the facility of writing blank verse. It is indeed no hard matter to write bad verse of any kind ; but, as so few of our poets have attained to that perfection in it which Shakespear and Milton have done, we have reason to suppose the art to be difficult. Whatever is well done in poetry or eloquence appears easy to do. Theatrical dialogue being an imitation of discourse, our critics do not require the appearance of effort and labour, but, on the contrary, the

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language

language of nature, and a just resemblance to the thing imitated. Possibly there is as much of difficulty in blank verse to the poet, as there appears of ease in it to the reader. Like the cestus of Venus, formed by the happy skill of the Graces, it best exerts its charms while the artifice of the texture is partly concealed. Dryden, who brought the art of rhyme to great excellence, endeavoured to introduce it on our stage; but nature and taste revolted against an imitation of dialogue in a mode so entirely different from that in which men discourse. The verse Mr. de Voltaire thus condemns is perhaps not less happily adapted than the iambic to the dramatic offices. It rises gracefully into the sublime; it can slide happily into the familiar; hasten its career, if impelled by vehemence of passion; pause in the hesitation of doubt; appear lingering and languid in dejection and sorrow; is capable of varying its accent, and adapting its harmony, to the sentiment it should convey, and the passion it would excite, with all the power of musical expression.

Even

Upon the CINNA of CORNEILLE. 211

Even a person who did not understand our language would find himself very differently affected by the following speeches in that metre :

LEAR.

Vengeance ! plague ! death ! confusion !—

Fiery ? what fiery quality ? why, Glo'ter,

I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall, and his wife :

The king would speak with Cornwall. The dear
father

Would with his daughter speak, commands her ser-
vice :

Are they inform'd of this ? my breath and blood !

Fiery ? the fiery duke ? tell the hot duke that—

MACBETH.

I have lived long enough : my way of life

Is fall'n into the fear, the yellow leaf :

And that which should accompany old age,

As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have ; but in their stead,

Curfies not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dares not.

The charm arising from the tones of
English blank verse cannot be felt by a
O 2 foreigner,

foreigner, who is so far from being acquainted with the pronunciation of our language, that he often mistakes the signification of the most common words ; of which there are many remarkable instances in this boasted translation of Julius Cæsar ; for he does not know that the word *course* signifies method of proceeding, but imagines it means a course of dishes, or a race. Brutus replies to Cassius's proposal to kill Cæsar ;

BRUTUS.

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
To cut the head off, and then hack the limbs.
Like wrath in death, and envy afterwards :
For Antony is but a limb of Cæsar.

Thus it is translated by Mr. de Voltaire.

BRUTUS.

Cette course aux Romains paraîtrait trop sanglante ;
On nous reprocherait la colère & l'envie,
Si nous coupons la tête, & puis hachons les membres,
Car Antoine n'est rien qu'un membre de Cæsar.

The following ingenious note is added by the translator. The word *course*, says he, perhaps

perhaps, has, an allusion to the Lupercal course. It also signifies a service of dishes at table. It is very extraordinary that a man should set up for a translator, with so little acquaintance in the language as not to be able to distinguish whether a word in a certain period signifies a race, a service of dishes, or a mode of conduct. In a piece entitled *Guillaume de Vade*; and attributed to Mr. de Voltaire, there is a blunder of the same kind. Polonius orders his daughter not to confide in the promises of Hamlet, who, being heir to the crown, cannot have liberty of choice in marriage like a private person. He must not, says the old statesman, carve for himself as vulgar persons do. The French author translates it, he must not cut his own victuals; and runs on about morsels, as if Hamlet's dinner, not his marriage, had been the subject of debate. The translator knew not that the word carve is often used metaphorically in our language for a person's framing or fashioning his lot or portion. We say, the lover feeds on hope; the warrior thirsts for glory: would it be

fair to translate that the lover eats a morsel of hope; and the warrior desires to drink a draught of glory? If such translations are allowed, the works of the most correct author may be rendered ridiculous. It is apparent that Mr. de Voltaire has depended entirely on the assistance of a dictionary to enable him to give the *most faithful translation that can be, and the only faithful one, in the French language, of any author, ancient or modern.*

It is necessary to present to those readers who do not understand French, the miserable mistakes and galimatheus of this dictionary work. Brutus, in his soliloquy meditating on what Cassius had been urging concerning Cæsar, thus expresses his apprehension, that imperial power may change the conduct of the man.

BRUTUS.

'Tis a common proof;
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the utmost round,

He

He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Cæsar may.

Thus Mr. Voltaire translates it,

BRUTUS.

— On fait assez quelle est l'ambition.
L'échelle des grandeurs à ses yeux se présente ;
Elle y monte en cachant son front aux spectateurs ;
Et quand elle est haut, alors elle se montre ;
Alors jusques au ciel élevant ses regards,
D'un coup d'œil méprisant sa vanité dédaigne
Les premiers échelons qui firent sa grandeur.
C'est ce que peut Cæsar.

“ One knows what ambition is: the ladder
of grandeurs presents itself to her ; in going
up she hides her face from the spectators ;
when she is at the top then she shews herself ;
then raising her view to the heavens, with a
scornful look her vanity disdains the steps of
the ladder that made her greatness. This it is
that Cæsar may do.”

In the original, lowliness is young ambi-
tion's ladder: the man who by feign'd humility,

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and

and courtesy, has attained to the power to which he aspired, turns his back on those humble means by which he ascended to it ; the metaphor agreeing both to the man who has gained the top of the ladder, or to him who has risen to the summit of power. In the translation, ambition ascends by steps of grandeurs, hiding her face from the spectators, when she is at the top, with a look or glance of her eye her vanity disdains the first steps ~~she~~ took ; which steps observe were grandeurs ; so the allegory is, vanity and ambition disdaining grandeur ; and the image presented is a woman climbing up a ladder, which is not a very common object, but more so than vanity's disdaining grandeurs.

I am sorry the translator had not a better English dictionary, for on that, not on his own knowledge of our tongue, it is plain he depended. In another instance it misleads him. After Porcia had importuned Brutus to communicate to her the secret cause of his perturbation, he says to her,

BRUTUS.

BRUTUS.

Porcia, go in a while ;

And, by and by, thy bosom shall partake

The secrets of my heart.

All my engagements I will construe to thee,

All the character of my sad brows.—

Leave me with haste.

The dictionary was consulted for the word construe ; and thus, according to the usual form, one may suppose it to have stood : To construe ; to interpret. This not serving the purpose, to interpret was next sought ; there he finds, to interpret or to explain ; again with indefatigable industry, excited by a desire to excel all translators and translations, he has recourse to the article to explain ; under this head he finds, to unfold or clear up ; so away goes the translator to clear up the countenance of Brutus.

Va, mes sourcils froncés prennent un air plus doux.

“ Go ;” says he ; “ my frowning brow shall take a softer air.”

There are so many gross blunders in this
work

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work it would be tedious to point them out; but it is to be hoped they will deter other beaux esprits from attempting to hurt works of genius by the masked battery of an unfair translation. Mr. Voltaire desires that by his translation all Europe will compare the thoughts, the stile, and the judgment of Shakespear, with the thoughts, the stile, and the judgment of Corneille. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to make the graces of style pass from one language to another; and our blank verse cannot be equalled by French blank verse. The thoughts might in some measure have been given, if the translator had understood the words in which Shakespear had expressed them. Upon the judgment of the authors in the choice of the story, in the conduct of it, in exciting the sympathies belonging to it, in the fashioning of the characters, in the nobleness of sentiment, and representation of Roman manners, we shall upon close examination of the Cinna and Julius Cæsar be able to pronounce.

As

As the subject of the drama is built on a conspiracy which every one is assured had not any effect, and the author has so conducted it as to render the pardon Augustus gives the conspirators an act of political prudence, rather than generous clemency, there is not any thing to interest us but the characters of Cinna, Emilia, and Maximus. Let us examine how far they are worthy to do so as set forth in this piece; for we have no historical acquaintance with them. Emilia is the daughter of Toranius the tutor of Augustus, who was proscribed by him in his triumvirate. As we have not any knowledge of this Toranius, we are no more concerned about any cruelty committed upon him than upon any other man; so we are not prepared to enter into the outrageous resentment of Emilia, especially as we see her in the court of Augustus under the sacred relation of his adopted daughter, enjoying all the privileges of that distinguished situation, and treated with the tenderness of paternal love. Nothing so much deforms the feminine

nine character as ferocity of sentiment. Nothing so deeply stains the human character as ingratitude.

This lady, however odious she appears to the spectator, is made to engage Cinna her lover, who is a nephew of the great Pompey, in a conspiracy against Augustus. Shakespear most judiciously laboured to shew that Brutus's motives to kill Cæsar were perfectly generous and purely public-spirited. Corneille has not kindled Cinna to his enterprize with any spark of Roman fire. In every thing he appears treacherous, base, and timid. Maximus, the other conspirator, seems at first a better character ; but in the third act he makes a most lamentable confession to a slave, of his love for Emilia, and his jealousy of Cinna : this slave gives such advice as one might expect from such a counsellor ; he urges him to betray his associates, and by means of a lie, to prevail upon Emilia to go off with him. Thus Maximus becomes as treacherous and base as Cinna his friend, and Emilia his mistress. The poet follows

Seneca's

Seneca's account of this affair in making Livia (who has no other business in the drama) advise Augustus to try the effect of measures of clemency, as his punishment of former conspiracies excited new ones. Augustus tells her she talks like a woman, treats her counsel with scorn, and then follows it. Augustus appears with dignity and sense in the other scene, and is the only person in the play for whom one has any respect. This is the plan of a work which is to shew Corneille's genius and judgment superior to Shakespear's. As Mr. Voltaire has given his translation of Julius Cæsar, I will just present to the reader a literal translation of the first scene of the first act, which begins by a soliloquy.

CINNA, TRAGÉDIE.
ACTE PREMIER. SCÈNE PREMIÈRE.

EMILIE.

Impatiens desirs d'une illustre vengeance,
Dont la mort de mon père a formé la naissance,
Enfans impétueux de mon ressentiment,

Que

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Que ma douleur seduite embrasse aveuglément,
 Vous prenez sur mon ame un trop puissant empire :
 Durant quelques momens souffrez que je respire,
 Et que je considere, en l'état où je suis,
 Et ce que je hazarde, & ce que je poursuis.
 Quand je regarde Auguste au milieu de sa gloire,
 Et que vous reprochez à ma triste mémoire
 Que par sa propre main mon père massacré
 Du trône où je le vois fait le premier degré :
 Quand vous me presentez cette sanglante image,
 La cause de ma haine, & l'effet de sa rage,
 Je m'abandonne toute à vos ardens transports,
 Et crois pour une mort lui devoir mille morts.
 Au milieu toutefois d'une fureur si juste,
 J'aime encor plus Cinna que je ne hais Auguste ;
 Et je sens refroidir ce bouillant mouvement,
 Quand il faut pour le suivre exposer mon amant.
 Oui, Cinna, contre moi moi-même je m'irrite,
 Quand je songe aux dangers où je te précipite.
 Quoique pour me servir tu n'apprehendes rien,
 Te demander du sang, c'est exposer le tien.
 D'une si haute place on n'abat point de têtes,
 Sans attirer sur soi mille & mille tempêtes ;
 L'issue en est douteuse, & le peril certain.
 Un ami deloyal peut trahir ton dessein ;

L'ordre

L'ordre mal concerté, l'occasion mal prise,
Peuvent sur son auteur renverser l'entreprise,
Tourner sur toi les coups dont tu le veux frapper ;
Dans sa ruine même il peut t'envelopper ;
Et quoi qu'en ma faveur ton amour exécute,
Il se peut en tombant écraser sous sa chute,
Ah ! cesse de courir à ce mortel danger :
Te perdre en me vengeance ce n'est pas me venger.
Un cœur est trop cruel quand il trouve des charmes
Aux douceurs que corroment l'amertume des larmes ;
Et l'on doit mettre au rang des plus cruels malheurs
La mort d'un ennemi qui coûte tant de pleurs.

Mais peut-on en verser alors qu'on venge un père ?
Est-il perte à ce prix qui ne semble légère ?
Et quand son assassin tombe sous notre effort,
Doit-on considérer ce que coûte sa mort ?
Cessez, vaines frayeurs, cessez, lâches tendresses,
De jeter dans mon cœur vos indignes faiblesses ;
Et toi qui les produis par tes soins superflus,
Amour, fers mon devoir, & ne le combats plus.
Lui céder c'est ta gloire, & le vaincre ta honte ;
Montre-toi généreux, souffrant qu'il te surmonte.
Plus tu lui donneras, plus il te va donner,
Et ne triomphera que pour te couronner.

I do not pretend, as Mr. Voltaire does, to make the reader a judge of the stile of Corneille by my translation ; he must allow for the want of versification, and be content with the thoughts, the sentiments, the conceits of the original.

EMILIA.

“ Impatient desires of an illustrious vengeance, to which the death of my father gave birth, impetuous children of my resentment, which my deluded sorrow embraces too blindly, you assume too great an empire over my mind. Suffer me to breathe a moment, and let me consider the state I am in, what I hazard, and what I would attempt. When I behold Cæsar in the midst of glory, you (I suppose this means, you, the impetuous children of the impatient desires of an illustrious vengeance) reproach my melancholy memory that my father, massacred by his hand, was the first step to the throne on which I see him. And when you present me that bloody image, the cause of my hatred, the effect of his rage, I
abandon

abandon myself to your violent transports, and think that for one death I owe him a thousand deaths. In the midst of so just an indignation I still love Cinna more than I hate Augustus ; and I find this boiling anger cool, when to obey it I must hazard my lover. Yes, Cinna, against myself, myself am angry, when I think of the dangers into which I precipitate thee. Though to serve me thou fearest nothing, to ask thee for blood is to expose thine. One beats not down heads from so high a place without drawing upon one's self a thousand and a thousand storms ; the issue is doubtful, the peril is certain. The order ill concerted, the opportunity ill chosen, may on their author overturn the whole enterprize, turn on thee the blow thou wouldst strike, and even envelope thee in his ruin ; and what thou executest for my sake may crush thee in its fall. Ah ! do not run into this danger. To ruin yourself in revenging me is not to revenge me. That heart is too cruel which finds a sweetness in that vengeance which is corrupted by the bitterness of sorrow ; and one

P should

should put in the rank of the greatest misfortunes the death of an enemy which costs so many tears. But can one shed tears when one revenges a father ? Is there a loss which does not seem light at that price ? And when his assassin dies by our means, ought we to consider what his death costs us ? Cease vain fears, cease foolish tenderness to affect my heart with your unworthy weaknesses : and thou who producest them by thy superfluous anxieties, O love, assist my duty, do not combat with it ; to yield to it is thy glory, to vanquish it thy disgrace ; shew thyself generous, suffer it to overcome thee. The more thou givest to it, the more it will give thee, and will triumph only to crown thee."

Such mighty nothings in so strange a stile

Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the karned smile.

The second scene of Emilia, and Fulvia her friend, is not so absurd as the soliloquy ; But the answer Emilia gives to Fulvia, who urges to her, that the benefits she has received from Augustus, and the credit she has with him should mitigate

mitigate her resentment, shews her disposition to be ungrateful, violent, and treacherous.

EMILIE.

Les bienfaits ne sont pas toujours ce que tu penses ;
D'une main odieuse ils tiennent lieu d'offenses :
Plus nous en prodiguons à qui nous peut haïr,
Plus d'armes nous donnons à qui nous veut trahir.
Il m'en fait chaque jour sans changer mon courage.
Je fais ce que j'étais, & je puis davantage ;
Et des mêmes présents qu'il verse dans mes mains
J'achette contre lui les esprits des Romains.
Je recevrais de lui la place de Livie,
Comme un moyen plus sûr d'attenter à sa vie.

“ Benefits do not always do what you think.
From an odious hand they are so many offences ; the more we bestow upon those who hate us, the more arms we furnish to those who may betray us. He bestows them upon me every day without changing my resolution. I am what I was, and I am able to effect more ; and with the presents he pours into my hands, I purchase the hearts of Romans to set them against him.

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him. I would receive from him the place of Livia, to gain surer means to attempt his life."

The next scene Cinna enters, and tells his furious charmer, that the conspirators enter into the plot with as much zeal as if they too were serving a mistress.

CINNA.

Tous s'y montrent portés avec tant d'allégresse,
Qu'ils semblent comme moi servir une maîtresse.—
Plût aux dieux que vous-même eussiez vû de quel zèle
Cette troupe entreprend une action si belle !
Au seul nom de César, d'Auguste, d'Empereur,
Vous eussiez vû leurs yeux s'enflammer de fureur ;
Et dans un même instant, par un effet contraire,
Leur front pâlir d'horreur, & rougir de colère.

Here is a childish play upon words, and a mere rant : for in those times neither the names of Cæsar, Augustus, or Emperor, were detested ; the monsters that afterwards assumed them might become odious.

The scene is very long as we may suppose
where

where such different sentiments and passions are to be expressed as those which belong to the lover and conspirator. Cinna assures Emilia that he concealed from his associates, that to avenge her father and obtain her he entered into this conspiracy.

CINNA.

Rien n'est pour vous à craindre ; aucun de nos amis
Ne fait ni vos desseins, ni ce qui m'est promis :
Et leur parlant tantôt des miseres Romaines,
Je leur ai tû la mort qui fait naître nos haines,
De peur que mon ardeur touchant vos intérêts
D'un si parfait amour ne trahit les secrets.

“ There is nothing for you to fear ; none of our friends know the designs, nor what is promised me. In speaking of the miseries of the Romans I was silent about the death which is the cause of our hatred, lest my warmth for your interests should betray the secrets of such a perfect love.”

There was not only discretion but good sense in this, for the secrets d'un parfait amour might not have been duly attended

to or properly revered, by a surly band of conspirators met to concert measures for such a perilous enterprize. In the next scene Augustus sends for Cinna and Maximus, to advise with them whether he shall restore liberty to the commonwealth. Here we have some respite from the strange medley of tender love and dire revenge, and in lieu of it a long political discussion of the conveniencies and inconveniencies of different modes of government.

Corneille has borrowed from Dion Cassius, and transferred to Cinna and Maximus, the speeches of Agrippa and Mécébas, when Augustus consulted them whether he should demit his power, and live a private man, as Sylla had done. Mr. Fenelon has very justly censured, as ill suiting that simplicity of style and manner with which Augustus expressed himself, the following lines ;

AUGUSTE.

Cet empire absolu sur la terre et sur l'onde,

Ce pouvoir souverain que j'ai sur tout le monde,

Cette

Cette grandeur sans bornes, et cet illustre rang,
Qui m'a jadis coûté tant de peine et de sang,
Enfin tout ce qu'adore en ma haute fortune
D'un courtisan flatteur la présence importune,
N'est que de ces beautés dont l'éclat éblouit,
Et qu'on cesse d'aimer si-tot qu'on en jouit.

“ This absolute empire over the earth and ocean, this sovereign power that I have over the whole world, this greatness without limits, and this illustrious rank which has heretofore cost me so much labour and so much blood ; in fine, all that the troublesome croud of flattering courtiers adores in my high fortune, is but a piece of pageantry, whose lustre dazzles, and that one ceases to admire as soon as one possesses it.”

These ostentatious expressions are perfectly ridiculous to those who are acquainted with the character of the speaker : but there is another fault much more detrimental to the drama, which is the aversion we conceive at the black treachery of Cinna, who when

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Augustus

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Augustus consults him as his friend, whether he shall lay down his power, and restore liberty to the common-wealth, advises him not to do it, with a great appearance of personal attachment to him, and zeal for his country; but in reality, that he may not lose a pretence to sacrifice him to the revenge of Emilia. This holds forth Cinna to the spectator as a perfidious friend, a wicked counsellor, a profligate citizen. A more atrocious conduct was perhaps never ascribed to any character on the stage, where the guilty person was intended to excite indignation and abhorrence; and is therefore the most flagrantly absurd in a case where the character is that on which the interest of the play is to turn.

Augustus having intimated to Cinna at the conclusion of their conference, that he was willing to give Emilia to him, he begins then to reflect upon his perfidy, and urges to Maximus the remorse he feels for the intended assassination. The poet seems to be afraid he has not yet sufficiently disgraced

graced his hero, and therefore makes Maximus reply to him thus ;

MAXIME.

Formez vos remors d'une plus juste cause,
De vos lâches conseils, qui seuls ont arrêté
Le bonheur renaissant de notre liberté.
C'est vous seul aujourd'hui qui nous l'avez ôtée,
De la main de César Brute l'eut acceptée,
Et n'eut jamais souffert qu'un intérêt léger
De vengeance ou d'amour l'eût remise en danger.

“ Derive your remorse from a juster cause,
from your base counsels, which alone put a
stop to the felicity of reviving liberty.
’Tis you alone that have now deprived us of
it. From the hand of Cæsar Brutus would
have accepted the liberty of Rome ; and
never, from a paltry interest of love or
revenge, would have again put it to hazard.”

As every movement in this play is to turn
on mean and selfish passions, as soon as
Maximus apprehends his rival is to receive
Emilia as the reward of his enterprize, he
suffers his slave to betray the plot to Augustus,

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ms. He then endeavours to persuade Emilia to escape with him. All this is very awkwardly conducted.

It is strange that a dramatic writer should not have studied human nature enough to perceive, that the only character which cannot interest upon the stage, is that which is mean, low, and contemptible. Great spirits, even though of a bad kind, engage our attention to all their operations, because they are capable of producing great events. We are curious to see what the audacious villain will dare to do; what the cunning one will contrive; but when a man is presented to us as a scoundrel, *un lâche*, we disdain to attend to his actions. Therefore, however well the great scenes of this play may be written; considered singly, they are very injudiciously managed. We shall now see Cinna appear so despicable, that to punish him would be below the dignity of Augustus; and to retain him as a friend, unworthy of any man. Augustus, informed by the double traitor Maximus, sends for Cinna, and

and reproaches him with every species of base ingratitude, tells him he first gave him his life, enriched him with the spoils of Antony, upon every occasion had been profusely liberal and kind to him; preferred his interest even to those who had fought for him, and by whose blood he had purchased the empire; and had admitted him, upon the death of Mécenas, into the first place in his confidence. Augustus adds too, that it was by his advice he retained his power; and after all this, says he, you would assassinate me. Cinna does not barely deny the conspiracy, but exclaims, "I, Sir, have I such a treacherous soul, such a base design!"

Augustus cuts him short in this disgraceful lie, shewing him he has full information of the plot; and very justly says, "The liberty of thy country could not be thy object, for then thou wouldst not have hindered my restoring it. Thou must design therefore to reign in my place. Alas! Rome must be unhappy indeed, if I were the only obstacle, and that after my death
it

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it should not fall into better hands than thine. Learn to know what thou art : descend into thyself : thou art honoured, praised, and loved, and all tremble before thee, so high have I raised thy fortune : but thou wouldst be the pity of those who now envy that fortune, if I abandoned thee to thy own little merit. Contradict me if thou canst ; tell me what is thy merit, what are thy virtues, what are thy glorious exploits, what are those rare qualities by which thou couldst pretend to my favour, what is it raises thee above the vulgar ? My favour is thy only glory ; thy power arises from it ; that alone raises and supports thee ; it is that, not thou, which is respected : thou hast neither rank nor credit but what arises from it ; and to let thee fall, I need only draw back the hand that supports thee."

Quel était ton dessein, et que pretendais-tu,
Après m'avoir au temple à tes pieds abattu ?
Affranchir ton pays d'un pouvoir monarchique ?
Si j'ai bien entendu tantôt ta politique,
Son salut désormais dépend d'un souverain,
Qui pour tout conserver tienné tout en sa main ;

Et

Et si sa liberté te faisait entreprendre,
Tu ne m'eusses jamais empêché de la rendre ;
Tu l'aurais acceptée au nom de tout l'état,
Sans vouloir l'acquérir par un assassinat.
Quel était donc ton but ? d'y regner en ma place ?
D'un étrange malheur son destin le menace,
Si pour monter au trône et lui donner la loi,
Tu ne trouves dans Rome autre obstacle que moi ;
Si jusques à ce point son sort est déplorable,
Que tu fies après moi le plus considérable :
Et que ce grand fardeau de l'empire Romain
Ne puisse après ma mort tomber mieux qu'en ta main.
Apprens à te connaître, et descends en toi-même.
On t'honore dans Rome, on te courtise, on t'aime ;
Chacun tremble sous toi, chacun t'offre des vœux ;
Ta fortune est bien haut, tu peux ce que je veux :
Mais tu ferais pitié, même à ceux qu'elle irrite,
Si je t'abandonnais à ton peu de mérite.
Ose me démentir, dis-moi ce que tu vaux,
Conte-moi tes vertus, tes glorieux travaux,
Les rares qualités par où tu m'as dû plaire,
Et tout ce qui t'élève au-dessus du vulgaire.
Ma faveur fait ta gloire, & ton pouvoir en vient ;
Elle seule t'élève, & seule te soutient,

C'est

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C'est elle qu'on adore, et non pas ta personne,
 Tu n'as crédit, ni rang qu' autant qu'elle t'en donne ;
 Et pour te faire choir je n'aurais aujourd'hui
 Qu' à retirer la main qui seule est ton appui.

Emilia enters, and behaves with the most insolent pride, undaunted assurance, and unfeeling ingratitude ; and declares to Augustus, that as long as she is handsome enough to get lovers he shall never want enemies. Augustus still adheres to his plan of clemency, (for that too is plan, and the result of prudent deliberation, not of generous magnanimity) he pardons Maximus, forgives Cinna in spite of his unworthiness, and bestows upon him Emilia and the consulship. Emilia is at last mitigated, and modestly tells Augustus that heaven has ordained a change in the commonwealth since it has changed her heart. What is there in all this that can move either pity or terror? In what is it moral, in what is it interesting, where is it pathetic?

It

It is a common error in the plan of Corneille's tragedies, that the interest of the piece turns upon some unknown person, generally a haughty princefs; so that instead of the representation of an important event, and the characters of illustrious persons, the business of the drama is the love-intrigue of a termagant lady, who, if she is a Roman, insults the Barbarians, if she is a Barbarian, braves the Romans, and even to her lover is insolent and fierce. Were such a person to be produced on our theatre, she would be taken for a mad poetess escaped from her keepers in Bedlam, who, fancying herself a queen, was ranting, and delivering her mandates in rhyme upon the stage. All the excuse that can be made for Corneille in such representation, is, that characters like these, dignified indeed with nobbler sentiments, were admired in the romances in which the manners of chivalry are exaggerated. By the institutions of chivalry every valiant knight professed a peculiar devotion

devotion to the fair sex, in whose cause, as the champion of the defenceless, and protector of the oppressed, he was always ready to take arms. A lady's interest being often the object, and sometimes her person the prize of a combat, she was supposed to inspire his courage ; and, as he was to be not less distinguished for politeness than valour, he affected an air of submissive obedience, while she, by the courtesy of knighthood, was allowed to assume a stile of superiority and command. To carry these manners into ancient Greece and Rome, and weave them into a conspiracy there, betrays want of judgment. In the strain of romance this drama is carried on. The lady enjoins her lover to kill Augustus ; that adventure atchieved he is to hope for her hand ; his glory is to be derived from her acknowledging him worthy of it ; she is continually exhorting him to deserve the honour of being beloved by her. The fate of Augustus, of the Roman empire, all the duties of the citizen and the friend, are to depend on her decision.

decision. She says to Augustus, when he has discovered the conspiracy, as a sufficient vindication of her lover,

Oui, tout ce qu'il a fait, il l'a fait pour me plaire,
Et j'en étois, seigneur, la cause et le salaire.

The author certainly intended to recommend Cinna to his spectators merely as a *loyal lover*, according to the phrase of romance : in every other light he appears contemptible, and indeed suffers himself to be used with the greatest contempt and indignity. As Shakespear laboured to shew that the motives of Brutus were untinctured by any bad passion ; on the contrary every movement in the mind of Cinna has the character of baseness, and whether he conspires or whether he repents of it, he is still, as he acknowledges himself to be,

Un esprit malheureux,
Qui ne forme qu'en lache un dessein genereux.

From this unhappy wretch who basely conceives a generous design, let us turn to Brutus. There we shall see the different

Q judgment

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judgment and genius of the artists. Brutus and Cinna are drawn in the same situation, conspiring against the foremost man of all this world : in the one we have the features and complexion of a villain, in the other the high-finished form of a noble patriot.

U P O N

UPON THE
DEATH
OF
JULIUS CÆSAR.

Q²

UPON THE
 DEATH
 OF
 JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE tragedies of Cinna, and Julius Cæsar, are each of them the representation of a conspiracy ; but it cannot be denied, that our countryman has been by far more judicious in his choice of the story. An abortive scheme, in which some people of obscure fame were engaged, and even in whom, as they are represented, the attempt was pardoned, more from contempt of their abilities and power, than the clemency of the emperor, makes a poor figure in contrast with that conspiracy, which, formed by the first characters in Rome, effected

Q 3

the

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the destruction of the greatest man the world ever produced, and was succeeded by the most memorable consequences. History furnishes various examples of base and treacherous natures, of dissolute manners, ruined fortunes, and lost reputations, uniting in horrid association to destroy their prince. Ambition often cuts itself a bloody way to greatness.—Exasperated misery sometimes plunges its desperate dagger in the breast of the oppressor. The cabal of a court, the mutiny of a camp, the wild zeal of fanatics, have often produced events of that nature. But this conspiracy was formed of very different elements. It was the genius of Rome, the rights of her constitution, the spirit of her laws, that rose against the ambition of Cæsar; they steeled the heart, and whetted the dagger of the mild, the virtuous, the gentle Brutus, to give the mortal wound, not to a tyrant, who had fastened fetters on his fellow-citizens, but to the conqueror, who had made the world wear their chains: one empire only remained unsubjected to them, and that he was preparing to subdue.

Can there be a subject more worthy of the tragic muse, than the imitation of an action so important in its consequences, and unparrelleled in all its circumstances ? How is our curiosity excited to discover what could engage the man of virtue in an enterprize of such a terrible kind ; and why, after its accomplishment, instead of being stigmatized with the name of conspirator and assassin, the decrees of an august senate, the voice of Rome, unite to place him one of the first on the roll of patriots ; and the successor of the murdered Cæsar, who devoted to destruction the most illustrious men of Rome, durst not offer violation to the statue of Brutus !

To obtain, from the English spectator, the same reverence for him, it was necessary we should be made to imbibe those doctrines, and to adopt the opinion by which he himself was actuated. We must be in the very capitol of Rome ; stand at the base of Pompey's statue, surrounded by the
Q 4 effigies

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effigies of their patriots ; we must be taught to adore the images of Junius Brutus, the Horatii, Decii, Fabii, and all who had offered dear and bloody sacrifice to the liberty of their country, to see this action in the point of view to which it offered itself to the deliberation of Brutus, and by which it was beheld by those who judged of it when done. To the very scene, to the very time, therefore, does our poet transport us : at Rome, we become Romans ; we are affected by their manners ; we are caught by their enthusiasm. But what a variety of imitations were there to be made by the artist to effect this ! and who but Shakespear was capable of such a task ? A poet of ordinary genius would have endeavoured to interest us for Brutus, by the means of some imagined fond mother, or fonder mistress. But can a few female tears wipe out the stains of assassination ? A base conspirator, a vile assassin, like the wretched Cinna of Corneille, would Brutus have appeared to us, if only the same feeble arts had been exerted for him. It is for the
genuine

genuine son of ancient Rome, the lover of the liberty of his country, we are interested. A concern raised for him, from compassion to any other person, would only have excited some painful emotions in the spectator, arising from discordant sentiments. Indeed, the common aim of tragedy writers seems to be merely to make us uneasy, for some reason or other, during the drama. They take any thing to be a tragedy in which there are great persons, and much lamentation ; but our poet never represents an action of one sort, and raises emotions and passions of another sort. He excites the sympathies, and the concern, proper to the story. The passion of love, or maternal affection, may give good subjects for a tragedy. In the fables of Phædra and Merope those sentiments belong to the action ; but they had no share in the resolution taken to kill Cæsar ; and, if they are made to interfere, they adulterate the imitation ; if to predominate, they spoil it. Our author disdains the legerdemain trick of substituting one passion for another. He is the great magician

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cian that can call forth passions of any sort. If they are such as time has destroyed, or custom extinguished, he summons from the dead those souls in which they once existed. Having sufficiently enlarged on the general scope of our author in this play, we will now consider it in the detail.

The first scene is in the streets of Rome. The tribunes chide the people for gathering together to do honour to Cæsar's triumph. As certain decorums did not employ the attention of the writers of Shakespear's days, he suffers some poor mechanics to be too loquacious. As it was his business to depress the character of Cæsar, and render his victory over his illustrious rival as odious as possible, he judiciously makes one of the tribunes thus address himself to the people :

MARULLUS.

Wherefore rejoice ? What conquest brings he home ?
What tributaries follow him to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels ?
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless
things !

O you

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O you hard hearts ! you cruel men of Rome !
Knew you not Pompey ? Many a time and oft
Have you climb'd up to walls and battlements,
To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The five-long day with patient expectation,
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome ;
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tyber trembled underneath his banks
To hear the replication of your sounds,
Made in his concave shores ?
And do you now put on your best attire ?
And do you now cull out an holiday ?
And do you now strew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood ?
Be gone——
Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the gods, to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude,

The next speech shews the general apprehension of Cæsar's assuming too great a degree of power.

FLAVIUS.

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FLAVIUS.

Let no images

Be hung with Cæsar's trophies. I'll about,
And drive away the vulgar from the streets :
So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
These growing feathers, pluckt from Cæsar's wing,
Will make him fly an ordinary pitch ;
Who else would soar above the view of men,
And keeps us all in servile fearfulness.

The second scene is the course at the Lupercal games, in which Antony appears the humble courtier of Cæsar. A soothsayer bids him beware the ides of March.

In the third scene there is a dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in which the latter tenderly reproaches Brutus that his countenance is not so open and cordial to him as formerly ; to this the other replies, he has some inward discontent,

And that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shews of love to other men.

This

This intimation of discontent encourages Cassius to try to incense Brutus against the growing power of Cæsar. On the shouts of the mob, Brutus expresses a fear that they are making Cæsar king ; this encourages Cassius to proceed in his design. He makes two speeches, in which he appears envious and malignant to Cæsar, of whom he speaks as men do, who, unwilling to confess the qualities that give to a rival superiority, dwell with malice on petty circumstances, in which he is not distinguished from ordinary men. The French critic is much offended at this scene, and says, it is not in the style of great men. The language of envy is always low. The speeches of Cassius express well his envious and peevish temper, and make him a foil to set off to advantage the more noble mind of Brutus. Cassius endeavours to stimulate Brutus to oppose the encroachments of Cæsar on the liberty of Rome, by setting before him its first deliverer, the great Junius Brutus ; a name revered by
every

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every Roman, but, undoubtedly, adored by his descendants.

This is truly imitation, when the poet gives us the just copies of all circumstances that accompanied the action he represents. Corneille's drama's are fantastic compositions, void of historical truth, imitation of character, or representation of manners. Some few lines from Seneca, ingrafted into the *Cinna*, have given it reputation. For, however custom may have taught a very ingenious and polite people to endure the insipid scenes of *l'amoureux et l'amoureuse*, the fault has been in the poets, not the spectators: all their critics have strongly condemned this mode of writing; and the public, by its approbation of this piece on account of the scenes between Augustus and *Cinna*, shews plainly how much dialogues of a noble and manly kind would please. Unhappily, Seneca's Augustus makes the *Cinna* of Corneille appear too mean and little. These borrowed ornaments never will afford perfectly well with the piece; they
break

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 255

break in upon the harmony of sentiment, and the proportion of characters, and fall greatly short of the easy propriety, and becoming grace, of a perfect set of imitations designed for, and fitted to the work, as in this tragedy of Julius Cæsar, where all characters appear in due degrees of subordination to the hero of the piece. Our poet, to interest us the more for Brutus, takes every occasion to make Cassius a foil for him. In the next scene he is represented by Cæsar in an unamiable light ; the opportunity of so fit an occasion is taken, to make some fine reflections on the malignant and envious nature of men, not softened by the joys of mirth, and endearing intercourse of social pleasures.

CÆSAR. (*To ANTONY, apart.*)

Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights :
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look ;
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.

ANTONY.

Fear him not, Cæsar, he's not dangerous ;
He is a noble Roman, and well given.

CÆSAR.

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CÆSAR.

Would he were fatter. But I fear him not :
Yet if my name were liable to fear,
I do not know the man I should avoid,
So soon as that spare Cæsius. He reads much ;
He is a great observer ; and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
As thou do'st, Antony ; he hears no music ;
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort,
As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit,
That could be mov'd to smile at any thing.
Such men as he be never at heart's ease,
Whilst they behold a greater than themselves ;
And therefore are they very dangerous.

Cæsar's blunt recital of the offer of a crown to Cæsar, in the next scene, is much censured by the critic, accustomed to the decorums of the French theatre. It is not improbable the poet might have in his eye some person of eminence in his days, who was distinguished by such manners. Many allusions and imitations which please at the time, are lost to posterity, unless they point at transactions and persons of the first consequence.

quence. Whether we approve such a character on the stage or not, we must allow his narration represents the designs of Cæsar's party, and the aversion of the Roman people to that royalty to which he aspired; and it was right to avoid engaging the parties in more deep discourse, as Shakespear intended, by a sort of historical process, to shew how Brutus was led on to that act to which his nature was averse.

The first scene of the second act presents Brutus debating with himself upon the point on which Cassius had been urging him. Cassius in his soliloquy, scene third, act first, seemed to intimate, that resentment had a share in his desire to take off Cæsar. Brutus, on the contrary, informs us, no personal motives sway him; but such as are derived from an hereditary aversion to tyranny, and the pledge the virtue of his ancestors had given the commonwealth, that a Brutus would not suffer a king in Rome; and these considerations compel him to take the following resolution:

R

BRUTUS.

258 *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR.*

BRUTUS.

It must be by his death ; and, for my part,
 I know no personal cause to spurn at him ;
 But for the general. He would be crown'd ;
 How that might change his nature, there's the question.
 It is the bright day that brings forth the adder ;
 And that craves wary walking : Crown him—that—
 And then I grant we put a sting in him,
 That at his will he may do danger with.
 Th' abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
 Remorse from power : and to speak truth of Cæsar,
 I have not known when his affections sway'd
 More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
 Whereto the climber upward turns his face ;
 But when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend. So Cæsar may :
 Then, lest he may, prevent.

How averse he is to the means by which
 he is to deliver his country from the dan-
 ger apprehended, appears in the following
 words :

BRUTUS.

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 259

BRUTUS.

Since Cassius first did ~~what~~ me against Cæsar,

I have not slept.

Between the ~~act~~ing of a dreadful thing,

And the first motion, all the interim is

Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream :

The genius, and the mortal instruments,

Are then in council ; and the state of man,

Like to a little kingdom, suffers then

The nature of an insurrection.

Disguise and concealment are so abhorrent
to the open ingenuity of his nature, that
righteous as he thinks the cause in which
he is going to engage, on hearing his friends
are come to him muffled up at midnight,
he cannot help breaking out in the following
manner.

BRUTUS.

O Conspiracy!

Sham'st thou to ~~show~~ thy dang'rous brow by night,

When evils are most free? O then, by day

Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough,

To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, Conspiracy,

Hide it in smiles and affability ;

For if thou put thy native semblance on,

R 2

Not

o

260 *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR.*

Not Erebus itself were dim enough

To hide thee from prevention.

Brutus rises far above his friend and associate Cassius, when, with a noble disdain, he rejects his proposal of swearing to their resolution.

BRUTUS.

No, not an oath. If not the face of men,

The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse,

If these be motives weak, break off betimes,

And ev'ry man hence to his idle bed ;

So let high-fighted tyranny range on,

'Till each man drop by lottery. But if these,

As I am sure they do, bear fire enough

To kindle cowards, and to steel with valour

The melting spirits of women ; then, countrymen,

What need we any spur, but our own cause,

To prick us to redress ? what other bond,

Than secret Romans, that have spoke the word,

And will not palter ? and what other oath,

Than honesty to honesty engag'd,

That this shall be, or we will fall for it ?

Swear priests, and cowards, and men cautelous,

Old feeble carrions, and such suffering souls

That welcome wrongs : unto bad causes, swear

Such

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 261

Such creatures as men doubt ; but do not stain
The even virtue of our enterprize,
Nor th' insuppressive mettle of our spirits,
To think, that or our cause, or our performance,
Did need an oath : when ev'ry drop of blood
That ev'ry Roman bears, and nobly bears,
Is guilty of a several bastardy,
If he doth break the smallest particle
Of any promise that hath past from him.

Is it not wonderful to see a poor player thus
ennoble the sentiments, and give full ex-
pansion to the magnanimity of the man styled
the deliverer of Rome?

Mr. Voltaire is so little sensible of the
noble delicacy of this speech, that he says
the conspirators are not Romans, but a parcel
of country-fellows of a former age who
conspire in a tippling-house.—Surely there
is no partiality in saying our author has
given Roman sentiments with a tincture of
the Platonic philosophy to Brutus ; and,
besides these more general characteristics,
has added many nice touches which specify
his personal qualities, We behold on the

R 3 stage

262 *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR,*

stage the Marcus Brutus of Plutarch rendered more amiable and more interesting. A peculiar gentleness of manners, and delicacy of mind, distinguish him from all the other conspirators ; and we cannot refuse to concur with the confession of his enemies, and the words of Antony.

ANTONY.

This was the noblest Roman of them all :
All the conspirators save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar ;
He, only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him, that nature might stand up,
And say to all the world ; *This was a Man !*

The following soliloquy prophetic of the civil war, subsequent to the death of Cæsar, spoken by Antony addressing himself to the dead body, is sublime and solemn.

ANTONY.

O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers.
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man,
That ever lived in the tide of times.

Woe

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 263

Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood !
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,
Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue,
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men ;
Domestic fury, and fierce civil strife,
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy ;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar,
That mothers shall but smile, when they behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war :
All pity choak'd with custom of fell deeds ;
And Cæsar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice
Cry Havock, and let slip the dogs of war.

This speech shews the secret enmity Antony bears to the conspirators, and prepares us for the inflammatory oration which at the obsequies of Cæsar he pronounces before the people.——I shall quote it at length, for as this tragedy has been brought by Mr. Voltaire into a comparison with the Cinna of Corneille, and he is pleased to call our

R 4

English

264. *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR.*

English piece a monstrous spectacle, and takes not the least notice of a speech which may be considered as one of the finest pieces of rhetoric that is extant, I am desirous to set it immediately before the reader, who will hardly find any thing monstrous in its form, or absurd in its matter, but quite the reverse. I suppose a popular address and manner, in an oration designed for the populace, would be deemed the most proper by the best critics in the art of rhetoric.

ANTONY.

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him.

The evil, that men do, lives after them,

The good is oft interred with their bones ;

So let it be with Cæsar ! noble Brutus

Hath told you, Cæsar was ambitious ;

If it were so, it was a grievous fault,

And grievously hath Cæsar answer'd it.

Here, under leave of Brutus, and the rest,

For Brutus is an honourable man,

So are they all, all honourable men,

Come I to speak in Cæsar's funeral.

He

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 265

He was my friend, faithful and just to me ;
But Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill ;
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious ?
When that the poor have cry'd, Cæsar hath wept ;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff,
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And Brutus is an honourable man
You all did see, that, on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition ?
Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious ;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not, to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause ;
What cause with-holds you then to mourn for him ?
O judgment ! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me.
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar,
And I must pause 'till it come back to me.

I PLEBEIAN.

Methinks, there is much reason in his sayings, &c.

ANTONY.

266 *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR.*

ANTONY.

But yesterday the word of Cæsar might
Have stood against the world ; now lies he there,
And none so poor to do him reverence.
O masters ! if I were dispos'd to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honourable men.
I will not do them wrong : I rather chuse
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
Than I will wrong such honourable men.
But here's a parchment, with the seal of Cæsar,
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will ;
Let but the commons hear this testament,
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read,
And they would go and kiss dead Cæsar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood ;
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

4 PLEBEIAN.

We'll hear the will ; read it, Mark Antony.

ALL.

The will, the will. We will hear Cæsar's will.

ANTONY.

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 267

ANTONY.

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it;
It is not meet you know how Cæsar lov'd you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Cæsar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad.
'Tis good you know not, that you are his heirs;
For if you should, O what would come of it?

4 PLEBEIAN.

Read the will, we will hear it, Antony; &c.

ANTONY.

Will you be patient? will you stay a while?
I have o'ershot myself, to tell you of it.
I fear, I wrong the honourable men,
Whose daggers have stabb'd Cæsar. I do fear it.

4 PLEBEIAN.

They were traitors, &c.

ANTONY.

You will compel me then to read the will?
Then make a ring about the corps of Cæsar,
And let me shew you him, that made the will.
Shall I descend? and will you give me leave?

ALL.

Come down.

3. PLE-

268 *Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR.*

3 PLEBEIAN.

You shall have leave.

ANTONY.

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
You all do know this mantle; I remember
The first time ever Cæsar put it on;
'Twas on a summer's evening in his tent,
That day he overcome the Nervii.
Look! in this place, ran Cassius' dagger through;
See, what a rent the envious Casca made;
Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd;
And as he pluck'd his curst steel away,
Mark, how the blood of Cæsar follow'd it!
As rushing out of doors, to be resolv'd,
If Brutus so unkindly knock'd, or no:
For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel,
Judge, oh you gods! how dearly Cæsar lov'd him;
This was the most unkindest cut of all;
For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,
Ingratitude, more strong than traitor's arms,
Quite vanquish'd him; then burst his mighty heart;
And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
Even at the base of Pompey's statue,
Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell.

O what

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 269

O what a fall was there, my countrymen !
Then I, and you, and all of us fell down :
Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.
O, now you weep ! and, I perceive, you feel
The dint of pity ; these are gracious drops.
Kind souls ! what, weep you when you but behold
Our Cæsar's vesture wounded ? look you here !
Here is himself, marr'd, as you see, by traitors.

I PLEBEIAN.

O piteous spectacle !

ANTONY.

Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny :
They, that have done this deed, are honourable.
What private griefs they have, alas ! I know not,
That made them do it ; they are wise and honourable ;
And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts ;
I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
That love my friend ; and that they know full well,
That give me public leave to speak of him ;
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action nor utt'rance, nor the power of speech,
To stir mens blood ; I only speak right on.

I tell

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I tell you that which you yourselves do know;
Shew you ~~first~~ Cæsar's wounds, poor, poor, dumb
 mouths!

And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
In every wound of Cæsar, that should move
The stunes of Rome to rise and mutiny.

ALL.

We'll mutiny.——

ANTONY.

Why, friends, you go to do you know not what.
Wherein hath Cæsar thus deserv'd your loves?
Alas! you know not. I must not tell you then.
You have forgot the will I told you of.

ALL.

Most true,—the will.—Let's stay, and hear the will.

ANTONY.

Here is the will, and under Cæsar's seal
To ev'ry Roman citizen he gives,
To ev'ry sev'ral man, sev'nty-five drachm's,

2 PLEBEIAN.

Most noble Cæsar!

ANTONY.

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,

His

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 271

His private arbours, and new-planted orchards,
On that fide Tiber; he hath left them you,
And to your heirs for ever; common pleasures,
To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves,
Here was a Cæsar!

Is there any oration extant in which the topics are more skilfully selected for the minds and temper of the persons to whom it is spoken? Does it not by the most gentle gradations arrive at the point to which it was directed? Antony first sooths his audience by assuring them, that Cæsar loved the poor, and sympathized with their distresses: by reminding them, that he had rejected the proffered crown, he removes, from their shallow understandings, all apprehension of that ambition in him which the conspirators alledged as the motive of their act: after these managements he proceeds further, and tells them of the will. There is a delicate touch in the observation, that Cæsar received the mortal wound in the very mantle he wore the day in which he had gained a victory over the Nervii, the fiercest of

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of their enemies. He excites tender pity, by mentioning the stab given by his beloved Brutus. The remark that he fell as a victim at the feet of Pompey's statue, whom the lower sort considered as of a party unfavorable to them, is another happy stroke in this piece. I am sorry that I must differ from the opinion of our commentator, who thinks the words, "O what a fall was there!" related to that circumstance; it seems rather to refer to what immediately follows:

ANTONY.

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down:

Whilst bloody treason flourish'd over us.

Meaning how the general state of the republic was affected by the fall of so great a man. As the illiterate people are afraid of being imposed upon by the arts of the learned and the eloquent, he very judiciously assures them he is no orator. The refinements of the French theatre, perhaps, would not endure the mob of Plebeians that appear in this scene. The fickle humour of the people, and the influence of eloquence upon their minds, are truly exhibited; and I must

own; as the imitation is so just, though the original may be called mean, I think it is not to be entirely condemned: one might perhaps wish the part of the mob had been shorter. The miserable conceit of Cæsar's blood rushing out of the wound to ask who so unkindly knocked, is indefensible. The repetition of the words, honourable men, is perhaps too frequent.

The oration of Brutus, in many parts, is quaint and affected, an unhappy attempt, as the learned commentator observes, to imitate that brevity and simplicity of expression, of which this noble Roman was a professed admirer. Our author, who followed with great exactness every circumstance mentioned in Plutarch, would probably have attempted to give to Antony the pomp of Asiatic eloquence, if his good sense had not informed him, that to be pathetic it is necessary to be simple.

The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius does not by any means deserve the ridicule
S
thrown

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thrown upon it by the French critic. The characters of the men are well sustained: it is natural, it is interesting; but it rather retards than brings forward the catastrophe, and is useful only in setting Brutus in a good light. A sublime genius, in all its operations, sacrifices little things to great, and parts to the whole. Modern criticism dwells on minute articles. The principal object of our poet was to interest the spectator for Brutus; to do this he was to shew, that his temper was the furthest imaginable from any thing ferocious or sanguinary, and by his behaviour to his wife, his friends, his servants, to demonstrate, that out of respect to public liberty, he made as difficult a conquest over his natural disposition, as his great predecessor had done for the like cause over natural affection. Clemency and humanity add lustre to the greatest hero; but here these sentiments determine the whole character of the man, and the colour of his deed. The victories of Alexander, Cæsar, and Hannibal, whether their wars were just or unjust, must obtain for them.

them the laurel wreath, which is the ambition of conquerors : but the act of Brutus in killing Cæsar, was of such an ambiguous kind, as to receive its denomination from the motive by which it was suggested ; it is that which must fix upon him the name of patriot or assassin. Our author, therefore, shews great judgment in taking various opportunities to display the softness and gentleness of Brutus : the little circumstance of his forbearing to awaken the servant who was playing to him on the lute, is very beautiful ; for one cannot conceive, that he whose tender humanity respected the slumber of his boy Lucilius, would from malice or cruelty, have cut short the important and illustrious course of Cæsar's life.

Shakespear seems to have aimed at giving an exact representation on the stage, of all the events and characters comprehended in Plutarch's life of Marcus Brutus ; and he has wonderfully executed his plan. One may perhaps wish, that a writer, possessed of all the magic of poetical powers, had not

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so scrupulously confined himself within the limits of true history. The regions of imagination, in which the poet is allowed an arbitrary sway, seem his proper dominion. There he reigns like Pluto over shadows huge and terrible, of mighty and august appearance, but yielding and unresisting. The terra firma of real life, and the open day-light of truth, forbid many pleasing delusions, and produce difficulties too stubborn to yield to his art. On this solid foundation however our author knew he could always establish a strong interest for his piece. Great knowledge of the human heart had informed him, how easy it is to excite a sympathy with things believed real. He knew too, that curiosity is a strong appetite, and that every incident connected with a great event, and every particularity belonging to a great character, engages the spectator. He wrote to please an untaught people, guided wholly by their feelings, and to those feelings he applied, and they are often touched by circumstances that have not dignity and splendor enough to please the eye accustomed to

to the specious miracles of ostentatious art; and the nice selection of refined judgment. If we blame his making the tragic muse too subservient to the historical, we must at least allow it to be much less hurtful to the effect of his representation upon the passions, than the liberties taken by many poets to represent well-known characters and events in lights so absolutely different from whatsoever universal fame, and the testimony of ages, had taught us to believe of them, that the mind resists the new impression attempted to be made upon it. Shakespear, perhaps not injudiciously, thought that it was more the business of the dramatic writer to excite sympathy than admiration; and that to acquire an empire over the passions, it was well worth while to relinquish some pretensions to excellencies of less efficiency on the stage.

As it was Shakespear's intention to make Brutus his hero, he has given a disadvantageous representation of Cæsar, and thrown an air of pride and insolence into his be-

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haviour, which is intended to create an apprehension in the spectator of his disposition to tyrannize over his fellow-citizens. In this haughty style he answers the petitions of Metellus Cimber, and the other conspirators, for the repeal of Publius Cimber's banishment: the speech suits the purpose of the poet, but is very blamable if compared with the historical character of the speaker, which ought certainly to have been more attended to. It will divert the English reader to see what Mr. Voltaire assures us to be a faithful translation of this speech; and I will therefore give the original and translation. When Metellus is going to fall at Cæsar's feet, he says to him,

CÆSAR.

I must prevent thee, Cimber.

These crouchings and these lowly curtesies
Might fire the blood of ordinary men,
And turn pre-ordinance and first decree
Into the lane of children. Be not fond;
To think that Cæsar bears such rebel blood,
That will be thaw'd from the true quality
With that which melteth fools; I mean, sweet words,
Low,

Upon the Death of JULIUS CÆSAR. 279

Low-crooked curties, and base spaniel-fawning.
Thy brother by decree is banished;
If thou dost bend, and pray, and fawn for him,
I spurn thee like a cur out of my way.
Know, Cæsar doth not wrong; nor without cause
Will he be satisfied.

CÆSAR.

Cimber, je t'avertis que ces prosternemens,
Ces génuflexions, ces basses flateries,
Peuvent sur un cœur faible avoir quelque pouvoir,
Et changer quelquefois l'ordre éternel des choses
Dans l'esprit des enfans; ne t'imaginer pas
Que le sang de Cæsar puisse se fondre ainsi,
Les prières, les cris, les vaines simagrées,
Les airs d'un chien couchant peuvent toucher un sot;
Mais le cœur de Cæsar résiste à ces bassesses.
Par un juste décret ton frère est exilé.
Flate, prie à genoux, & léche moi les pieds;
Va, je te rosserai comme un chien; loin d'ici.
Lorsque Cæsar fait tort, il a toujours raison.

Ben Johnson, by a faulty transcript of this speech, or the blunder of a player, had been led into the mistake of charging Shakespear with the absurdity of making Cæsar

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say, he never did wrong without just cause; and Mr. Voltaire has seized on this false accusation.—It is perfectly apparent to any person who understands English, that Cæsar by preordination and first decree means that ordinance and first decree he had before past for Cimber's banishment. And he says, I will not be prevailed upon by these prostrations and prayers of yours to turn my decrees into such momentary laws as children make. If there had been any doubt of his meaning, the latter part would have cleared it.

CÆSAR.

I was constant, Cimber should be banish'd;
And constant do remain to keep him so.

It is surprising that some friend did not prevent the critic from falling into so strange a blunder about changing the eternal order in the minds of children. Many of his countrymen understand our language very well, and could easily have explained to him the signification of the preposition into, and that to change into always signifies to convert

vert from one thing to another. Sweet words, crooked curtsies, and base fawnings; he translates, the airs of a setting dog. Lecher les pieds is not a proper translation of to fawn. Fawning courtiers would be strangely rendered by feet-licking courtiers: a fawning style, a fawning address, are common expressions; but did any one ever think of a feet-licking style? a feet-licking address? Nor is Je te rosserai a juster translation of I will spurn thee: the first being a very low phrase; and to spurn is in our language a very noble one, and not unfit for the highest poetry or eloquence; indeed is oftener so used than in ordinary discourse.

Mr. Row in the Fair Penitent makes Horatio say to Lothario,

I hold thee base enough

To break through law, and *spurn at sacred order.*

If Mr. Voltaire should translate these words, he would triumph much that one of our most elegant poets talked of drubbing sacred order. The translator seems
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not even to know the English alphabet; for in translating Porcia's words,

PORCIA.

If it be no more,

Porcia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

He puts in a note upon Harlot, to assure us that the word in the original is *W*——; which, if he understood our blank verse, he would know, could not make up the metre.

Mr. Voltaire formerly understood the English language tolerably well. His translation of part of Antony's speech to the people, in his own play of the death of Julius Cæsar, though far inferior to the original, is pretty good; and in his tragedy of Junius Brutus he has improved upon the Brutus of our old poet Lee: he has followed the English poet in making the daughter of Tarquin seduce the son of Junius Brutus into a scheme for the restoration of her father; but with great judgment has imitated only what was worthy of imitation; and by

by the strength of his own genius has rendered his piece much more excellent than that of Mr. Lee.

It must be allowed that Mr. Voltaire, in his translation of Shakespear, has nobly emulated those interpreters of Homer, who, Mr. Pope tells us, misunderstand the text, and then triumph in the awkwardness of their own translations. To shew he decides with the same judgment and candour with which he translates, it will be necessary to present the sentence he has pronounced upon the genius of our great poet. Speaking of Corneille he says, he was unequal like Shakespear, and like him full of genius; mais le genie de Corneille etait à celui de Shakespear, ce qu'un frégateur est à l'égard d'un homme du peuple né avec le même esprit que lui. I have given his own words because they do not carry any determinate sense. I conjecture they may be thus translated; The genius of Corneille is to that of Shakespear, what a man of great rank is to one of the lower sort born with the same talents

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talents of mind. When we speak of genius, we always mean that which is original and inherent, not any thing produced or derived from what is external. But Mr. Voltaire by saying the genius of Corneille has that superiority over our countryman, which a person of rank has over a man in a low station, born with the same talents, perplexes the thing very much. It seems to carry the comparison from the genius to the manner of the writers.

If that manner is preferable, which gives the most becoming sentiments and the noblest character to the principal person of his drama, there is no doubt but our poet has perfectly established his superiority over his competitor; for it cannot be denied, that Cinna is un homme du peuple, (a low fellow,) compared to Brutus,

Mr. Voltaire, in all the comparisons he has made between these authors, has not taken into the account that Shakespear has written the best comedy in our language :
that

that the same man should have had such variety of talents, as to have produced Macbeth and the Merry Wives of Windsor, is astonishing. Where is there an instance among the ancients or moderns of one poet's uniting the sublime and pathetic, the boldest inventions of fiction, and the most just and accurate delineation of characters; and also possessing the *vis comica* in its highest perfection? The best French poets have been those

Who from the ancients like the ancients writ;
and who have aspired to the secondary
praise of good imitators: but all our critics allow Shakespear to be an original. Mr. Pope confesses him to be more so than even Homer himself. It has been demonstrated with great ingenuity and candour, that he was destitute of learning: the age was rude and void of taste: but what had a still more pernicious influence on his works, was, that the court and the universities the statesmen and scholars, affected a scientific jargon. An obscurity of expression was thought the veil of wisdom and knowledge;

ledge; and that mist common to the eye and noon of literature, which in fact proves it is not at its high meridian, was affectedly thrown over the writings, and even discourse of the learned, who often preferred images distorted or magnified, to a simple exposition of their thoughts. Shakspeare is never more worthy of the true critic's censure, than in those instances in which he complies with this false pomp of manner. It was pardonable in a man of his rank, not to be more polite and delicate than his cotemporaries; but we cannot so easily excuse such superiority of talents for stooping to any affectation.

I may perhaps be charged with partiality to my author, for not having indulged that malignant spirit of criticism, which delights in exposing every blemish. I have passed over beauties and defects in the same silence, where they have not essentially affected the great purposes of the drama. They are of so palpable a nature, the most inattentive reader must perceive them: the splendor of
his

his fine passages is equally striking. It appears to me, that the dramatic requires a different species of criticism from any other poetry. A drama is to be considered in the light of a living body; regularity of features, grace of limbs, smoothness and delicacy of complexion, cannot render it perfect, if it is not properly organized within, as well as beautiful in its external structure. Many a character in a play, like a handsome person paralytic, is inert, feeble, and totally unfit for its duties and offices, so that its necessary exertions must be supplied by some substitute. The action is carried on much after the manner it is done in epic poetry, by the help of description and narration, and a series of detached parts.

It is unfair to judge singly of every line, in a work where the merit depends on the result of various operations, and repeated efforts to obtain a particular end. Works without genius are usually regularly dull, and coldly correct, resembling those living characters that want, while

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They

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They dream the blank of life along,

Sense to be right, and passion to be wrong.*

Some allowances must be made to those who are more animated and more employed, if in the bustle of great actions, and the exertion of great powers, they fall into some little errors. The genius of Shakspeare is so extensive and profound, I have reason to fear a greater number of excellencies have escaped my discernment, than I have suffered faults to pass without my animadversion : but I hope this weak attempt to vindicate our great dramatic poet, will excite some critic able to do him more ample justice. In that confidence I have left untouched many of his pieces, which deserve the protection of more judicious zeal and skilful care.

* Dr. Young's Satire.

F I N I S.

